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**The Struggle Over the Constitution: Chinese Politics
1917-1919**

A thesis presented

by

Allen Yuk-Lun Fung

to

The Committee on the PhD in History and East Asian
Languages

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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The Struggle Over the Constitution: Chinese Politics, 1917-1919

Allen Yuk-Lun Fung

Advisor: Philip Kuhn

Abstract

This thesis examines the constitutional crisis in China in 1917-1918. In July 1917, the military general Duan Qirui refused to reconvene parliament and rewrote electoral laws. This caused an outrage, and in response Sun Yatsen and the parliamentarians went South to establish a rival government. In the next year or so, China was involved in a bitter civil war.

In many ways, this constitutional crisis was the consequence of the constitutional problems which confronted the Chinese Republic since its inception. There was, for instance, the issue of how power should be shared under the new system. How much power should the President have *vis-a-vis* the Premier? There was also the question regarding the relationship between the center and the regions. How much power should Beijing delegate to the localities under the newly established constitutional system? Finally, there was the issue of the proper role of the military in politics. Given the power of the military generals at this time, how should power be balanced between the civil and the military?

In part one of this thesis, I analyze how Chinese politicians debated these issues, and how the constitutional crisis of 1917 represented their failure to resolve these questions. I examine this struggle from the respective angles of the participants involved: Duan Qirui, Sun Yatsen, the parliamentary members, a regional warlord

named Lu Rongting, and the public in general. Through this I hope to show their differences in perception of these constitutional questions, as well as the respective solutions they offered to resolve the problems.

In part two, I examine how Chinese politicians struggled to reach a compromise. I focus on a politician named Xu Shichang, who became president in October 1918. Against all odds he pulled the country out of the civil war, and brought about a peace conference in which the two sides discussed substantive constitutional issues. But just when a compromise looked imminent, Xu's conference broke up, and his effort came to nought. I end by explaining why this happened, and examine the implications this had for the constitutional future of China as it stood in 1919.

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For my parents and Shirley

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Introduction: The Constitutional Question

When Yuan Shikai died in June 1916, one may say the political situation finally began to look bright for China. Even with his predominant military power, Yuan was not able to bring back the monarchy, and it seemed like the republican system brought about by the 1911 revolutionaries was here to stay. There was at this time a great deal of goodwill and optimism in the political arena as well, as former enemies vouched to leave behind their old rivalries to make the constitutional system work. But within a year's time the country would again be embroiled in a bitter struggle over the constitution. In July 1917, the Premier, Duan Qirui, refused to recall the parliament dissolved just the month before, and instead decided to convene a provisional senate to revise the constitution. Sun Yatsen and the Guomindang were bitterly opposed to such a move, and they soon formed a rival government in the South to "protect the constitution". Why did events suddenly take such an unfortunate turn in 1917?

The crisis in 1917 was in many ways another episode in China's torturous struggle for constitutional rule in the early twentieth century. Ever since it was generally agreed that China needed a constitution, Chinese leaders and politicians had debated on how constitutional rule could and should work out in practice. Just before its demise in 1911, the Qing monarchy introduced a series of reforms in that direction, establishing provincial and national assemblies to advise the government. The intention was to share power with the public, however limited the amount of power the monarchy was actually willing to share. The success of the 1911 Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Chinese Republic certainly accelerated China's move toward constitutional rule. A Provisional Constitution was written, a parliament

established, and free elections based on a limited franchise were now held. But as is well-known, Yuan Shikai, the military general who became the first president of the Republic, was to destroy this new system within months of his tenure. Yuan dissolved the parliament, openly flouted the Provisional Constitution, and eventually even declared himself emperor.

Yuan's monarchical attempt in the end failed, but any optimism for the prospects of constitutional rule would soon prove to be premature. Yuan might be justifiably cast as the culprit for many of the problems the Chinese Republic faced in the first few years, but as Chinese politicians soon realized, the problem did not lie in Yuan alone. There were many constitutional issues which remained unresolved, and this was to become apparent soon after Yuan's death. Firstly, for instance, there was the problem of the lack of consensus on how power should be shared within the government. The Provisional Constitution stipulated the establishment of "responsible cabinets", which were to be the chief decision-making body in government. Yet it also granted the President considerable powers, such as the right to appoint the Premier. So what should the balance of power be within the executive? Now that autocracy in the styles of the late Qing and Yuan Shikai were to be replaced by constitutional rule, how should government power be shared? The fact that there was no consensus within the political arena on this issue was to create grave problems in the months ahead.

There was also the question regarding the proper balance of power between the center and the province. Ever since the late Qing there had been vigorous debates on how power should be shared between the center and the localities. The death of Yuan Shikai made this question the more urgent, as military leaders of the provinces only

gained in power now that their predominant military leader in Yuan Shikai was dead. How should the restored constitutional system balance the power between the center and the region from now on?

Thirdly and finally, there was the question about the proper role of the military in politics. The 1911 Revolution was accompanied by the emergence of the military, not only because the Revolution was started by the New Armies in the first place, but also because the Revolution succeeded only after Yuan Shikai threw his support behind it. Yuan, of course, thoroughly abused the republican system after he became president. It is true that Yuan was now dead, but his former subordinates remained powerful, and there was no consensus on what role these military commanders should play in the restored constitutional system.

These fundamental constitutional questions were to surface soon after Yuan's death, and the constitutional crisis of 1917 was in many ways a direct consequence of the failure of Chinese leaders and politicians to resolve these problems satisfactorily. My thesis will focus on this crisis of 1917, and use it as a vehicle to broaden our understanding of the problems of establishing constitutional rule in early twentieth century China. It will analyze how Chinese politicians debated and struggled with these constitutional issues, and probe into the reasons why a consensus was so hard to come by. Instead of using the conventional straightforward narrative approach, the first half of this thesis will examine this constitutional struggle from the respective angles of the participants involved: the head of the Beijing government, Duan Qirui; the leader of the *hufa* (protect the constitution) movement, Sun Yatsen; the parliamentary members, who lost their status because Duan refused to recall them; the regional warlord Lu Rongting, who ruled the province where the *hufa* movement was

based; and the public in general. Through this I hope to show their differences in perception of the constitutional question, the respective solutions they offered to resolve the problem, and the means they used to achieve their objectives.

In the second half of the thesis, I will show how Chinese politicians tried to reach a compromise in the midst of this bitter struggle over the constitution. My primary focus of attention will be on a seasoned politician named Xu Shichang, who became president of the country in October 1918. Against all odds he pulled the country out of the civil war, and quite single-handedly brought the North and the South back to the negotiating table. In the Shanghai Peace Conference of 1919, Xu managed to have the two sides discuss and debate substantive constitutional issues, with the intention of resolving some of the constitutional problems which had plagued the Republic since its inception. At the end of the thesis, I will detail how successful Xu eventually was, and the implications his effort had for the constitutional future of the country in 1919.

The sources I employ in this thesis are of a wide variety: government documents, intelligence reports, newspapers, memoirs and private manuscripts, to name but a few of the categories. Here I want to highlight those materials which I think are of particular interest:

1. Government Documents in the Second Historical Archives, Nanjing

Although the collection on my period of study is not complete, the materials in the Second Historical Archives are probably the most important first-hand materials I use in the thesis. Of particular significance are the confidential correspondence

between Zhu Qiqian, the Chief Delegate of the North in the 1919 Shanghai Conference, and the Premier at that time, Qian Nengxun. These telegrams and letters are very informative regarding the contemporary political situation, as well as the mechanics of the Conference as viewed by Zhu and the Beijing government. Most of these materials have not been used before.¹

2. The Intelligence Reports of the Guangdong Customs

They can be found both in the Second Historical Archives and the Guangdong Provincial Archives. These are daily reports written by the Guangdong Customs mainly on the political developments of the province. Only a very small portion of them has been used by historians before.² These reports are particularly useful because very few documents or newspapers about Guangdong during the 1910s survive till the present day, and these reports provide us with much more information about Guangdong politics and society than the usual ambassador reports. They are also full of invaluable inside information regarding the dealings between Chinese politicians and the foreign powers.

3. Parliamentary Records

Thanks to the Second Historical Archives, The Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica and the Hoover Institution, I have been able to gather much material

¹They are classified under the personal archives of Zhu Qiqian. Second Historical Archives, 3003.

²A small fraction of them has been translated into the Chinese and published as *Guanngdongsheng danganguan* ed. & trans. "Sun Zhongshan zai diyici hufa yundong zhong", *Sun Zhongshan yanjiu* ed. *Guangdongsheng Sun Zhongshan yanjuhui* 2:380-408.

about the Chinese parliament in the 1910s. Of particular importance are the parliamentary minutes, which keep a record of who said what on what issue at that time. They are very informative on the factional politics in the parliament in this period, and tell us a great deal about the respective ideological positions of the different parties. I have relied heavily on these minutes especially in chapter one.

Part One

Chapter One:

The Origins of the Constitutional Crisis in 1917: The View from Duan Qirui

In late July 1917, Premier Duan Qirui announced that he would not recall the parliament which was dissolved just before Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus a month earlier. Instead, he decided to convene a Provisional Senate to write a new Parliamentary Organic Law, and prepare for new parliamentary elections to be held. His actions were to have far-reaching consequences, because they would not only result in the launching of the protect-the-constitution (*hufa*) movement and the establishment of a rival government in Guangdong by Sun Yatsen, but they were also to leave China bitterly divided for the next ten years. In fact, it was not until 1927 that China was reunited by the completion of the Northern Expedition by the Nationalists.

What prompted Duan to pursue such drastic actions? Liang Qichao, speaking for Duan, said that the Republic needed "a new lease of legitimacy". The Republic, according to Liang, had been discredited by Zhang Xun's restoration attempt, and the only way to regain people's confidence was to follow the practice of 1911 and call a Provisional Senate to reform the political system.³ Many contemporaries were not convinced by this argument. They saw Duan's actions as purely self-serving, with the sole intention of getting rid of a parliament which had earlier battled with him for political power.⁴ While there is certainly some truth to the latter view, even Duan's

³See Chapter 4. *Shibao*, 1 August, 1917, p.1; Zhang Pengyuan, *Liang Qichao yu minguo zhengzhi*, p.95.

⁴See Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, pp.95,102-103. Liang conceded that despite his constitutional arguments, one of the main reasons for his actions was his belief that members of the old parliament were unruly and factious: Ding Wenjiang ed., *Liang Qichao nianpu changbian*, p.831.

critics would concede that he actually showed a great deal of goodwill to the parliament when he first became the Premier in mid-1916. In fact, during his tenure in 1916-1917 Duan more than once defended the parliament from the vociferous attack of his fellow military generals.⁵ Why then was there such a radical change in attitude on Duan's part in 1917?

To understand this, I believe, we must go back to the months of 1916-1917, and examine the relationship between Duan and the parliament during that period. What I will argue is that Duan's growing resentment toward the parliament came from the fact that he believed, and quite justifiably, that the latter was not only unfairly encroaching upon his powers as Premier, but was also encouraging the President to do likewise as well. But as I will also demonstrate, the reason why the parliament was so assertive of its authority was a direct consequence of the ambiguities of the Provisional Constitution (*PC*) of 1912 itself. The *PC* was, in many ways, telling of the fact that Chinese politicians in the early Republic had yet to come to a consensus regarding how power should be shared under the new constitutional arrangement. The *PC* was, for instance, very vague concerning how much power the executive should have *vis-a-vis* the legislature. The problem was: what role should the legislature play, given the fact that it was the only elected body within the central government? How often should the parliament use its power to veto executive policy? The *PC* was equally ambiguous about the workings of the executive. What should the proper balance of power between the Premier and the President be? If the Premier held the primary responsibility for overseeing government affairs, how much and how often should the President interfere with decision-making? As it turned out, these ambiguities not only

⁵I will elaborate on this in later sections.

gave Duan's enemies an opportunity to undermine his position as Premier, but, more importantly, they *brought to life*, as well as *furnished the vocabularies* for, the rivalry between Duan and his opponents. All this, I will show, led to a complete breakdown in compromise in the political arena which served, to pave the way for actions of Duan in July 1917.

The Ambiguous Legacy

When vice-president Li Yuanhong succeeded Yuan Shikai as President in June 1916, he inherited a Chinese political arena clouded with uncertainties. Yuan was dead, but the Southern provinces were still in rebellion, and China was still deeply embroiled in a civil war. Now that Yuan was dead, would, and should, all the legislations and personnel of his regime pass away with him as well? The rebelling provincial leaders, and especially the Guomindang members among them, were adamant that Yuan's measures be invalidated, the most controversial being his dissolution of the parliament in 1913, and his introduction of a new Constitution in 1914 in replacement of the *PC*.⁶ The Northern provinces, led by Duan Qirui, however, were strongly in favor of retaining the 1914 Constitution.⁷ It was because of this that Li was so careful when he announced his succession to the presidency in June. Since Li had been the vice-president before Yuan's dissolution of the parliament, even the

⁶Li Chien-nung, *The Political History of China, 1840-1928*, pp.354-355.

⁷See Duan Qirui's telegram soliciting opinions on this matter in late June in Cen Xuelu, *Sanshui Liang Yansun xiasheng nianpu* 1:346-347.

Southern provinces did not dispute the legitimacy of his succession.⁸ But should the succession be in accordance with the *PC* of 1912, or should it based upon Yuan's constitution of 1914? To avoid controversy, Li simply declared himself President, without clarifying on which constitution he based his actions.⁹

A political compromise among the various parties was eventually reached in the late summer months of 1916. Duan Qirui, on his part, agreed to restore the *PC* and recall the parliament of 1913. This in effect meant that the Guomindang, outlawed and rigorously persecuted by Yuan Shikai, would now return to the political arena, and would return in a grand fashion, thanks to its substantial majority in the 1913 parliament. The Southern provinces and the Guomindang, on their part, would end their rebellion and recognize the existing Secretary of State appointed by Yuan Shikai, Duan Qirui, as Premier. The composition of the new Cabinet was likewise drawn up in this spirit of compromise: Guomindang members were appointed as heads of four key ministries: Foreign Affairs, Justice, the Interior, and the Navy. On the other hand, Duan himself took over as Minister of the Army on top of his premiership, while his allies took Finance, Communications, and Agriculture and Commerce.¹⁰

The problem was how this compromise would work out in practice. Now that Duan Qirui was Premier, how much power should, and would, he command in the government? This question was much more difficult to answer than one might expect,

⁸United States Department of State (hereafter USDS) 893.00/2463 Reinsch to the Secretary of State, 14 June, 1916, pp.4-5.

⁹Zhang Guogan, "Jindaishi pianduan de jilu", *Jindaishi ziliao* no.37 (1978:2), p.162. Zhang knew the events so well because he actually helped Li to draft that particular declaration.

¹⁰Li, *Political History*, pp.354-357.

because there had never been a consensus among Chinese politicians regarding how power should be shared within the central government since 1911. In the wake of the 1911 Revolution, there were a great deal of debates regarding whether China should adopt a presidential or a cabinet style of government.¹¹ In the end, those who supported the former, Sun Yatsen being one of them, triumphed. This was why when the revolutionaries wrote the *Structural Outline of the Provisional Government of the Republic of China* in late 1911,¹² the Provisional President was given wide-ranging powers in the government, with the Provisional Senate being given only marginal control over his actions.¹³

But this debate over what kind of republican government China should have was far from over, and political circumstances soon dictated that the original presidential system be revised. With the anticipation that Yuan Shikai would become the first President of the Republic, Guomindang revolutionaries were convinced of the need to revise the *Outline* and write a constitution which would keep the President's power in check.¹⁴ This was why the *PC* they wrote in 1912 was so radically different

¹¹See Zhang Yufa, *Minguo chunian de zhengdang*, p.368. Song Jiaoren was one of the leaders who wanted cabinet governments: K.S. Liew, *Struggle for Democracy: Sung Chiao-jen and the 1911 Revolution*, pp.131-137. Sun was strongly in favor of presidential governments, and this was why he opposed Song's repeated attempts in late 1911 to revise the *Outline*: Liew, *Struggle*, pp.136-138; Chen Xiqi ed., *Sun Zhongshan nianpu changbian* 1:598.

¹²The document was drawn up in November, 1911, and was later revised several times. For the complete text, see Jing Zhiren, *Zhongguo lixianshi*, pp.488-491.

¹³While under the *Outline* there were ministers who helped the President in running government affairs, there was no Premier and no sense of a cabinet, and the President was the clear-cut head of the executive. This contrasted sharply with the 1912 Provisional Constitution. Furthermore, the powers of the Provisional Senate under the *Outline* were rather ill-defined. It was not clear whether the Senate could question the President for government policies not submitted to the Senate, nor was it clear whether the Senate could impeach the President or his ministers for wrong-doing.

¹⁴Zhang, *Zhengdang*, p.369; Liew, *Struggle*, pp.148-149.

in philosophy from the *Outline* written only months earlier. Under the *PC*, the President's powers were drastically reduced and effectively transferred to the Cabinet. Article 44, for instance, stipulated that the Cabinet was responsible for assisting the President in government affairs. Article 30 stated that while the President had overall responsibility over the political affairs of the country, he would need the countersignatures of the Cabinet in whatever legislation he proposed.¹⁵ Contemporaries called this system "responsible cabinets",¹⁶ and it was intended to be a system in which powers were vested into the hands of the Premier and other Cabinet ministers, who were expected to exercise power on the behalf of the President.¹⁷ The thinly-disguised objective was to limit the power of Yuan Shikai, whom the revolutionary leaders deeply distrusted.

But the actions of the revolutionaries were to have grave consequences. In drastically revising the *Outline*, the revolutionaries no doubt raised the importance of the role of the Premier and the Cabinet in the decision-making process, but they never quite specified what the constitutional role of the President should now be. While the Premier and the Cabinet should now be responsible for the daily administration of the country's affairs, did it mean that the President should now command no leverage in the decision-making process at all? Granted that the President's orders were not valid unless they were countersigned by his Cabinet ministers, but did this necessarily mean that the President should be nothing but a figure-head? And if it was indeed intended that the President should indeed stay outside of politics, how could one account for the

¹⁵For the text, see Jing, *Lixian*, pp.492-498.

¹⁶Note that this term itself was not used in the Provisional Constitution.

¹⁷Note again that this was not explicitly laid down in the Provisional Constitution, even though many contemporaries believed this was the case. See, for instance, Kang Youwei, *Gonghe pingyi*. p.106.

fact that he was empowered by the *PC* to select the Premier and his Cabinet ministers in the first place?¹⁸

President vs Premier

These questions were to come to the forefront as soon as the *PC* was restored in mid-1916, because it was Duan Qirui who had now become the Premier. As the head of the Cabinet, Duan expected, and quite justifiably, that he would assume a predominant position in the decision-making process within the government. After all, he was not the person who lobbied for the restoration of the *PC* in the first place. If anything, if he had gotten his way, then the 1914 Constitution would have been retained, and the President, rather than the Premier and the Cabinet, would have become the chief decision-maker in the administration.¹⁹ It is likely that Duan was well-aware of the ambiguities of the *PC* regarding the respective powers between the President and the Premier from the very beginning. As soon as he became Premier in July 1916, he issued a statement to President Li Yuanhong reminding Li of what he believed the respective powers of the President and the Cabinet should be under the *PC*. In this statement, Duan stated that since the *PC* was in the spirit of "responsible cabinets", the President should avoid making decisions and taking responsibilities. Duan said, in terms reminiscent of the political philosophy of the Meiji oligarchy toward the Japanese emperor, that if the President was to be involved in daily government administration and got tangled up in political struggles, it would have the

¹⁸Article 34 of the *PC*.

¹⁹This is because the 1914 Constitution gave very extensive powers to the President. For the text of the 1914 Constitution, see Jing, *Lixian*, pp.499-507.

unfortunate effect of undermining the "dignity of the office of the presidency". Duan conceded that on paper the *PC* did seem to have given the President certain prerogatives, such as those in appointing officials, issuing orders, and so on, but he believed that in practice the Cabinet should handle all these functions on the President's behalf. As a result, Duan wanted all government correspondence be first directed to the Cabinet Office, and furthered to the President for consultation only at the Cabinet's discretion.²⁰

So the issue at stake was not merely about who should make decisions, but also about who should have access to what information. Duan's scheme of government would severely limit the channels through which the President could gather information about government policies, and without information it was naturally impossible for the President to have any leverage in decision-making. Under Duan's style of government, the President indeed assumed barely more significance than the Japanese emperor. Li, for instance, was not allowed to participate in Cabinet meetings. He would receive no agenda before the meetings, and no reports after them. Since important government documents were first directed to the Cabinet office and then forwarded to Li only when the Premier felt necessary, Li was often left in the dark concerning government affairs. Li was still, as stipulated by the *PC*, the person responsible for issuing official orders, but Duan used him as a mere rubber-stamp.²¹ The fact that the Cabinet Secretary, Xu Shucheng, often showed no respect to Li naturally only worsened the problem. It was reported that Xu once even shouted at Li

²⁰Second Historical Archives (SHA), Nanjing, 1027/50(2). The original document to the President cannot be found, but there is a copy in the archives of the Ministry of Finance.

²¹See the letter of resignation of Li's private secretary, Ding Shiyi, in February, 1917: Lai Xinxia et.al., *Beiyang junfa* 3:282-286.

when Li hesitated over the signing of a document, and Li himself remarked that Xu was a person he could never work with.²²

Given Li Yuanhong's weak and indecisive character, he might still have accepted the arrangement without an audible murmur.²³ But many of his associates were not willing to give in without a fight, and the matter soon provided the setting for deep-seated antagonism toward Duan to surface.²⁴ It is true that with the restoration of the *PC* in mid-1916, there was a shared determination among politicians, irrespective of their affiliations and political ideologies, to make the republican system work.²⁵ But old rivalries could not be wiped out overnight. It is true that the Guomindang, which held a commanding majority in the resumed parliament, had now disintegrated into various rival factions, each with its own political agenda, but most of these factions still shared a deep-seated suspicion toward Duan and his government.²⁶ After

²²Zhang Guogan, "Zhonghua minguo neige bian", *Jindaishi ziliao* no.40 (1979:3), pp.173-174. Zhang was at this time the Minister for Agriculture and Commerce, and maintained close relations with Li.

²³There seemed to be a consensus on this point. See Zeng Yujun, "Li Duan maodun yu fuyuan chongtu", *Beiyang junfa shiliao xuanji*, ed. Du Chunhe 1:264; Zhang Shuyong et.al., *Kuilei zongtong Li Yuanhong*, p.214. Li was indeed very deferential to Duan in the very beginning, much to the anger of many Guomindang members: see *Shibao*, 17 June, 1916, p.3.

²⁴Li was certainly on very close terms with a number of Guomindang members. Some Guomindang members were rather open concerning their intention to use Li as a bulwark against Duan. See the intelligence reports of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, translated in Zhang Bofeng, *Beiyang junfa* 3:38, 42.

²⁵There was certainly a great deal of goodwill in the political arena. USDS 893.00/2463. Reinsch to the Secretary of State, 14 June, 1916, p.5; P. Reinsch, *An American Diplomat in China*, p.203; *Shibao*, 3 August, 1916, p.3. The military was likewise extending its goodwill: the letter of Wang Shizhen to Zhang Xun, dated 23 September, 1916, in Shi Hua ed., "Zhang Xun cangzha", *Jindaishi ziliao* no.35 (1965), pp.7-8

²⁶The Guomindang held about a two-third majority in parliament, but it had by this time disintegrated into roughly four large factions. On the radical side there was the Minyou Society led by people like Ma Junwu. This wing was close to Sun Yatsen, and was nearly always anti-government. Slightly closer to the center was the Yioushui Society, led by people like Wu Jingnian. They were still rather suspicious of Duan, but they did support him during the debate on China's participation in the World War in 1917.

all, Duan was one of Yuan Shikai's key supporters when the latter dissolved the parliament and outlawed the Guomindang. This distrust toward Duan was particularly pronounced among the more radical members of the Guomindang, who were emerging to be the dominant force in parliamentary politics.²⁷ They included parliamentarians such as Ma Junwu²⁸ and Zou Lu; and the Minister of the Interior, Sun Hungyi.²⁹ Even though they were numerically only a minority in the parliament, they were often able to exert great political influence, not only because of the stature of their leaders, but also because they were skilful at exploiting any misgivings other members of parliament might have toward Duan Qirui. These radicals maintained strong ties with Sun Yatsen and the Chinese Revolutionary Party. Even though Sun himself had called for reconciliation in mid-1916, he was all along very suspicious of Duan,³⁰ and this critical attitude was echoed by the radicals. For instance, the radicals told the Japanese

There was then the Chengyou Club, led by people like Wang Zhengting, which kept its distance from Sun Yatsen and was more issue oriented. Last but not least was the Political Science Society which was composed of politicians who were ready to cooperate with Duan Qirui. For a discussion of these various factions, see Shao Hsi-ping, *Tuan Ch'i-jui, 1912-1918: A Case Study of the Military Influence on the Chinese Political Development*, pp.164ff. See also Li Xin et.al., *Zhonghua minguoshi*, no.2 vol.2, pp.39-40.

²⁷It is difficult to spell out the exact membership of this radical group. We can only say there was a core group which included Ma Junwu, Ju Zheng, Sun Hungyi, Liu Chengyu, Ye Xiasheng, Lu Fu, Wen Shilin, and so on. They were invariably the leaders of any anti-Duan effort, which I will describe in detail in the following sections. They were also often able to gain the support of the more moderate Guomindang members such as Wu Jinglian and Zhang Ji, although this latter group was much less combative against Duan.

²⁸Ma was one of the heroes of the 1911 Revolution, and was in fact one of the drafters of the *Outline* in 1911. Xu Youchun et.al. eds., *Minguo renwu da cidian*, p.678. He had by this time clearly emerged as the leader of the radicals: See Ju Zheng, *Meichuan puji*, p.48.

²⁹Sun Hungyi was originally a Progressive, but since 1916 he had joined ranks with former Guomindang members in the Minyou Society: Xu, *Cidian*, p.785.

³⁰See Sun's letter on 5 July, 1916 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:316. In this letter Sun remarked that if he had the money when Yuan Shikai died, he would have formed a provisional government, and would not have compromised with the North.

embassy many times that they doubted the sincerity of Duan in working with them.³¹ Sun Hungyi, who defected from the ranks of the Progressives to become a leader of the Guomindang radicals, was likewise a harsh critic of Duan's government, even though he himself was a member of Duan's government.³²

It is within this context that we can understand why Duan's scheme drew such hostile reaction, even though Duan might be merely acting according to the wishes of the original drafters of the *PC*, and even though Guomindang radicals might have supported similar schemes when Yuan Shikai was, and if he still were, President. Indeed, the injection of factional politics into constitutional debates made the latter all the more contentious. It was perhaps also not a surprise that the most vocal opponent of Duan's scheme of government turned out to be Li's private secretary, Ding Shiying, who was introduced to Li by Sun Hungyi in the first place.³³ While Ding conceded that the Premier should take primary responsibility over government administration, he did not believe that the Premier and the Cabinet should make all the decisions on the behalf of the President. As he said, the *PC* did specifically give the President certain prerogatives, and it simply did not make sense if the President was to be totally uninformed about government affairs. And since there were provisions in the *PC* empowering the Cabinet to temporarily take over the business of the President's office when the latter was vacant, Ding argued it implied that under *normal* circumstances

³¹See the intelligence reports of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Zhang, *Beiyang*, 3:30,33,35.

³²Sun had become very close with the hard-line Guomindang members. See Zhang Shuyong ed., *Wu Jinglian nianpu changpian* (manuscript), p.84. I am grateful to Professor Zhang Shuyong of Tianjin Normal University for allowing me to read his compilation when I was in Tianjin in early 1995. The compilation included a great deal of valuable materials related to Wu Jinglian, who was a prominent member of parliament at that time. The most precious were the memoirs of Wu on those years.

³³Zhang, "Neige", p.175.

the Cabinet did not have the right to decide everything for the President. In an effort to assert the President's authority, Ding submitted a treatise entitled *Procedural Matters Between the Cabinet Office and the President's Office* to the Cabinet in late August 1916. In this document, Ding stated that in order to enhance mutual understanding between the Cabinet and the President, the President should have the right to attend all Cabinet meetings. Furthermore, he advocated that *all* government documents be furthered to the President, irrespective of their importance.³⁴

Duan was outraged by these demands, because he saw these as thinly-disguised measures aimed at robbing him of the authority constitutionally given to him by the PC. Immediately after Ding presented his demands, Duan left Beijing for Tianjin, and threatened to resign and dissolve his Cabinet.³⁵ But even in his bitterness Duan still tried to accommodate the wishes of Li Yuanhong and Ding. In early September, he struck an agreement with Li and Ding. Under this agreement, Li acknowledged that the Cabinet was primarily responsible for making decisions in matters regarding the administration of the government and that he would make no undue objections. Duan, in return, promised to consult the President in all important matters of the state. While Li would still not enjoy the right to participate in Cabinet meetings, Duan agreed to give him a copy the agenda of every week beforehand, as well as to have a minister report to him on the results of the meeting afterwards. On top of this, Duan and other ministers promised to meet with the President weekly to discuss with him matters related to the state.³⁶

³⁴See Ding's letter of resignation in February, 1917, which described what he wanted in detail: Lai, *Beiyang*, 3:280-290.

³⁵*Shibao*, 29 August, 1916, pp.1-2.

³⁶*Shibao*, 2 September, 1916, p.2; Shao, *Duan*, pp.173-175.

But this arrangement only helped to resolve the situation for the time being. The larger question of what role the President should play in the government remained unanswered, and this was exposed again during the incident of Sun Hungyi's dismissal as Minister of the Interior in October, 1916. Even though Sun was a member of Duan's Cabinet, Sun had all along been a bitter critic of Duan, and this was why he enjoyed such widespread support among the radicals in the first place. Soon after he took over the ministry, he tried to strengthen his power, and replaced a large number of officials with his own associates. Those dismissed officials angrily responded by filing a complaint to the Court of Administrative Arbitration. The Court found Sun guilty of misconduct, and Duan therefore asked Sun to resign.³⁷ But Sun would have none of it. He argued that the Court had no constitutional status under the *PC*, and therefore its decisions should not be binding. Duan consequently drafted an order to dismiss Sun and asked Li to endorse it, only to find Li refusing to do so.³⁸

The debate on the relative powers of the President and the Premier was hence reopened. The *PC*, to be sure, did stipulate that the President should have the power to "appoint and dismiss officials",³⁹ but was this to be in theory or in fact? If the Cabinet was responsible for the daily administration of the government, then should the President ever exercise this prerogative when he knew he was doing it against the wishes of the Cabinet? In the end, Duan had to compromise with Li by dismissing his

³⁷Duan wanted to get rid of Sun not only because Sun often criticized him, but also because he had evidence that Sun was using his powers as the Minister of the Interior to profit himself: Zeng Yujun, "Huanhai chenfulu", *Jindaishi ziliao* (1988:1), pp.30-31. Zeng was a close associate of Duan, even though he was often critical of Duan in his memoirs.

³⁸Shao, *Tuan*, pp.1801-183; Li, *Minguoshi*, pp.50-51

³⁹Article 34.

private secretary and most trusted associate, Xu Shucheng, before he could persuade Li to endorse the dismissal of Sun.⁴⁰

Premier Vs Parliament

But as Duan was to realize, this was but one front from which his authority as Premier would be questioned. What was to be an even more formidable challenge was to come from the parliament dominated by Guomindang members. From the very beginning of Duan's premiership, there were already differences in opinion concerning what the role of the parliament should be within the administration. In accordance with the *PC* and the various parliamentary laws, the parliament was given a wide range of powers. The parliament was responsible for selecting the President,⁴¹ and even though it did not select the Premier or other Cabinet members, it had the right to veto any candidates. Furthermore, not only did the parliament have the right to introduce its own legislation, its approval must also be sought for all major financial or political matters. The parliament also had the right to impeach the President and Cabinet ministers, as well as to demand explanations from the government for the rationale of any of its policies.⁴²

⁴⁰*Shibao*, 26 November, 1916, p.2; 29 November, 1916, p.2.

⁴¹Article 29. The *PC* originally gave these powers only to the Senate, assuming that the parliament would be a one-house body. But when it was decided in 1912 that China would have a Senate and a House of Representatives, these powers were extended to both houses via various parliamentary laws: see Qian Shifu, *Beiyang zhengfu shiqi de zhengzhi jidu* 1:24-25.

⁴²Article 19.

In retrospect, the extensive powers given to the parliament were hardly surprising. Many of the regulations governing the prerogatives of the parliament were written by the Guomindang revolutionaries in 1912, a time when Yuan Shikai was President. There was certainly a belief at that time that the parliament must act as a bulwark against any possible dictatorial tendencies of Yuan. But many of these prerogatives were only *preventive* in nature. The executive, as led by the Premier and the Cabinet, was still responsible for the daily administration of the government, although the parliament in theory had the right to challenge any of its policy.

So the problem was: how often should the parliament exercise its prerogative to challenge government policies? Under normal circumstances this might perhaps have been a non-question. Even though the Chinese parliament, unlike its British counterpart, was not directly responsible for selecting the Cabinet, the fact that it was responsible for selecting the President who would in turn nominate the Premier, and the fact that it had the right to veto any candidates, made it likely that the Cabinet would be composed of politicians on friendly terms with its majority party.⁴³ Hence under normal circumstances there should not be major differences between the Premier and the parliament. But the awkward problem in 1916 was that the parliament approved of Duan's selection as Premier only grudgingly. The result of this is that we have a situation in 1916 in which the Premier and majority party in Parliament were actually formerly bitter political rivals. Member of the Chinese parliament felt, and quite rightly, that they had a special mandate to oversee government affairs, because while they were popularly elected, neither the President nor the Premier was.⁴⁴ Under

⁴³Article 34.

⁴⁴This contrasted with the American system, and made the legislative even less inclined to respect the executive.

these circumstances, the question of how active a role should the parliament play in the administration became the more contentious an issue.⁴⁵

What was unfortunate was that the *PC* gave no specific instructions on this, and by 1916 there were few precedents for Republican politicians to follow. To Duan Qirui, the parliament should not be involved with the details of government administration, simply because this was not its primary duty. The parliament's first and foremost task, in Duan's view, was to draft a permanent constitution as stipulated by the *PC*.⁴⁶ While we might interpret this as a pretext on the part of Duan to extend his power, his position on this question was actually endorsed by prestigious newspapers such as the *Shibao*.⁴⁷ But many parliamentarians did not subscribe to this view. In fact, some Guomindang radicals argued that the parliament should assume a commanding position in government administration, closely overlooking every aspect of government affairs. Sun Hungyi, for instance, told the American ambassador Paul Reinsch that the parliament must "control public administration".⁴⁸ Representative Zou Lu took special effort to increase the role of the parliament in government administration, and he initiated the largest number of bills in the parliament among all

⁴⁵We may perhaps call the *PC* a hybrid constitution, combining both British and American philosophies of government: See the series of articles in the *Peking Gazette*, 29 August, 31 August, 1 September, 1916.

⁴⁶See his official statement in *Zhengfu gongbao*, 30 June, 1916 (no.175). Reinsch, *American Diplomat*, p.204

⁴⁷See *Shibao*, 25 August, 1916, p.2.

⁴⁸Reinsch, *American Diplomat*, p.204.

parliamentarians in this period.⁴⁹ Some members of parliament even frankly suggested that the more power for the parliament the better.⁵⁰

If the parliament were able to quickly complete a new and permanent constitution which would define the boundaries of authority specifically, then there would not have been a serious problem. But the parliament was itself bitterly divided over these issues when it started to draft the new constitution. Parliamentary members, for instance, were hopelessly split over whether parliamentary approval should be necessary for the appointment of the Premier and its Cabinet under the new constitution. The radicals wanted the appointment of each and every member of Cabinet to require parliamentary approval under the new constitution.⁵¹ Yet other parliamentary members, most notably those from the Research Clique who supported Duan Qirui, advocated that only the Premier's appointment should require parliamentary approval, and that the Premier should be allowed to pick his Cabinet colleagues at his own wish.⁵² There were also heated debates concerning the parliament's right to impeach the Premier. The radicals wanted greater flexibility in the parliament's use of impeachment, while supporters of Duan strongly opposed to this, fearing that the parliament would become too powerful at the expense of the

⁴⁹Zou Lu, *Huigulu*, 1:103.

⁵⁰*Shibao*, 11 September, 1916, p.2. This was advocated by Liu Chengyu, a prominent hard-line Guomindang member.

⁵¹Ju Zheng was lobbying hard for this: see *Shibao*, 30 March, 1917, p.1. Ye believed that at least the approval of the House of Representatives should be required: *Shibao*, 5 April 1917, pp.2-3.

⁵²*Shibao*, 5 April 1917, pp.2-3. Liang Qichao, in fact, did not believe even the Premier's appointment should require parliamentary sanction: *Shibao*, 11 September, 1916, p.1.

executive.⁵³ In many of these debates, even though the radicals might enjoy the upper-hand in terms of support, the fact that no terms of the draft could be voted upon until three-quarters of all parliamentary members were present, and that no entries could be passed unless two-thirds of those present supported them, made it nearly impossible for anything to be passed quickly. Those who were opposed to the radicals' demands often stayed away from the meetings to ensure that the radicals would not get enough votes on those issues.⁵⁴

These differences acted to further drive Duan and his opponents apart. The rivalry had become as much about the issues as about age-old personal animosities. The radicals were relentless in using the issue of parliamentary authority to fan opposition within the parliament against Duan's government, and often with great success. This was why from the very inception of Duan's premiership, Duan found himself under the severe scrutiny of the parliament. It is true that parliamentary members gave a near unanimous approval to Duan's premiership in mid-1916, but Duan soon realized that their support was not to be taken for granted. For instance, when Duan tried to nominate his own associates, first Lu Zhengxiang, then Cao Rulin, to become the Minister for Foreign Affairs in late 1916, he was met with fierce opposition from parliamentary members. On both occasions his nominations were turned down, even though Duan showed great patience in explaining his choices to the

⁵³In the original draft, the parliament could impeach the President only if he had committed treasonable crimes. But radicals like Lu Fu wanted the parliament to be able to use the power of impeachment in times when the President was "creating internal chaos". The imprecise nature of the term naturally would give the parliament a lot of flexibility in deciding when to use impeachment. See *Shibao*, 18 March, 1917, p.3; 20 March, 1917, p.3.

⁵⁴This was the tactic used by Duan's supporters to oppose any measures they did not like: see *Shibao*, 18 December, 1916, p.2.

parliament in person.⁵⁵ In the end, Duan was grudgingly forced to nominate a Guomindang member, Wu Tingfang, to the position.

In this particular instance, one may perhaps still argue that since the parliament was explicitly empowered by the *PC* to veto any ministerial appointment, what it did to Duan was totally within its constitutional prerogatives. Yet on other occasions its demands were on much shakier grounds. For instance, when Duan Qirui dismissed Sun Hungyi from political office in October 1916, some members of parliament were furious about it and said that no minister should be dismissed without parliamentary approval, even though they themselves would concede that there was no specific clause in the *PC* which had such stipulation.⁵⁶ The radicals were ruthless in their attack on the government and its policies, and they challenged any government decision in which the parliament was not consulted, however trivial the issue at stake might be. Sometimes such tactics could reach comical proportions. A case in point was when they criticized the government for granting honors to civilians without prior consultation with the parliament, even though it was actually specifically stated in the *PC* and the statutes that the President had the prerogative to award such honors.⁵⁷

⁵⁵See the parliamentary minutes in *Zhongyiyuan gongbao*, Second plenary session, no.15, pp.7ff. The parliamentary minutes I will be using in the following paragraphs are gathered from the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, China, the Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford. I am grateful to these places for their assistance. About the number of votes for and against the nomination, see Zhongguo dier lishi danganguan ed. *Zhonghua minguoshi dangan ziliao huibian* series 3:1136-1137. See also the rough treatment Duan faced when he tried to nominate Lu: *Shibao*, 8 October, 1916, pp.1-2.

⁵⁶See Danganguan, *Huibian*, 3:1138-1139, *Zhongyiyuan*, Second plenary session no.29, appendix pp.2-3. Not surprisingly, this protest was spearheaded by hardliners like Wen Shilin as well.

⁵⁷SHA 1002/9(2). 12 October, 1916.

Nowhere did the *PC* state that the executive needed to consult the legislative on such trivial matters.⁵⁸

Duan must have been alarmed by the fact that such attacks on his government were becoming numerous and frequent, and they usually took the form of the so-called *Letters of Inquiry*. Under the *PC* and various parliamentary laws, the parliament was empowered to deliver these Letters to the Cabinet and seek explanations for government policies, provided there were more than twenty members of parliament endorsing such Letters.⁵⁹ The Cabinet would then have an obligation to answer such questions within a reasonable amount of time, and if necessary, appear before the two houses to explain its policy in person. It is not clear how the original drafters intended the functions of such Letters to be, but they surely would have been surprised to see how much these Letters became part of the daily political life in 1916-1917. In fact, critics were right to say that these Letters had become the tool of the parliament to encroach upon the powers of the executive, and even writers in neutral newspapers lamented that these Letters had made it impossible for Cabinet ministers to perform their normal functions.⁶⁰

⁵⁸This was precisely the Cabinet's reply to the House of Representatives on 24 October, 1916. SHA 1002/9(2). Some observers were beginning to fear what they called a "parliamentary autocracy". See *Shibao*, 1 December, 1916, p.2; 3 December, 1916, p.1; Kang Youwei's letter to Li Yuanhong on 11 November, 1916, in Lai, *Beiyang*, 3:439-443

⁵⁹*Qian, Jidu*, 1:24

⁶⁰Cabinet ministers apparently were forced to spend a great deal of their time to deal with these Letters: see *Shibao*, 11 October, 1916, p.1. Even the long-time Guomindang member, Tan Renfeng, said that things had gone too far: see his speech in a meeting in memory of Huang Xing and Cai E on 1 December, 1916. Shi Fangqin ed., *Tan Renfeng ji*, p.157.

Furthermore, these Letters were often used to discredit the government rather than to genuinely seek explanations from the government for its policies. This can be seen from the often very combative language in which these Letters were couched. There seemed to be a premium placed on being vicious: the more scathing the Letter the better. The most dramatic example was the Letter by Zou Lu presented to the House of Representatives in October 1916, which he called the *Ten Great Questions*. In this Letter, Zou launched an all-out attack on the government: The government, he said, was inefficient, as evidenced by the fact that it had taken so long to present a national budget. Zou criticized Duan for spending too much money on the military, and for allowing his government to be filled with corrupt officials who were only interested in using government resources for their private gains. In fact, Zou even said that it was now a matter of life-and-death for China, and that if nothing was to be done about Duan's "unconstitutional actions", China's national survival would be threatened.⁶¹

One can easily imagine how frustrated Duan must have felt in face of these attacks. Even though Duan had only been Premier for four months by that time, he had essentially been blamed for every evil in the government administration, real or imagined. What was more was that the *Ten Great Questions* were but the high point of a steady stream of vicious criticisms against his government, which had become the norm in day-to-day parliamentary debates. Very often these attacks betrayed a great deal of disdain for Duan's government. For instance, when Duan nominated his associate Lu Zhengxiang for the position as Minister for Foreign Affairs, one member

⁶¹ *Zhongyi yuan*, Second plenary session, no. 17, appendix pp. 14ff.

said that Duan did so with "sinister intentions",⁶² and some others started to call Lu a "traitor".⁶³ On another occasion, one member, speaking about the necessity of introducing self-government to the provinces, caustically remarked that he did not believe the Cabinet would ever have the "good conscience" to introduce measures to make this happen.⁶⁴ This lack of trust was again vividly exposed in the debate on whether the Cabinet should have the power to reintroduce in the same plenary session legislations which had earlier been rejected. Some members of parliament opposed it vehemently, only because they feared that the Cabinet would "play games" with the parliament by reintroducing defeated bills again and again.⁶⁵

This was not all. The radicals were determined to dislodge Duan from power, and more than once they tried to orchestrate a movement to impeach him.⁶⁶ But the problem for the radicals was that even though a significant portion of parliamentary members might share their suspicion toward Duan, they never managed to get the votes needed, because it would take three-quarters of parliamentary members to be present before any impeachment bill could be voted upon. Duan's supporters, therefore, could always defeat any impeachment bill simply by being absent.⁶⁷ The only remaining constitutional channel to displace Duan for the radicals was to have Li

⁶²Again, the words of a radical leader, Qin Guangli. *Zhongyiyuan*, Second plenary session, no.15, p.8. Lu, of course, was responsible for signing the Twenty-One Demands in 1915 with Japan.

⁶³*Shibao*, 8 October, 1916, p.2.

⁶⁴*Canyiyuan gongbao*, Second plenary session, no.39, pp.27-28.

⁶⁵*Canyiyuan*, Second plenary session, no.43, pp.22-23.

⁶⁶*Shibao*, 3 December, 1916; 18 December, 1916; 19 January, 1917, p.1. The commentators said that there was an impeachment frenzy.

⁶⁷*Shao, Tuan*, p.184.

the President dismiss him, but it was not clear whether even this was possible. This was because while theoretically the President had the power to appoint and dismiss officials, the *PC* did not state explicitly whether the President would have the power to dismiss the Premier. Since the *PC* stipulated that all orders from the President had to be countersigned by the responsible minister, it ironically meant that the President would need the signature of the Premier should he want to dismiss the latter.⁶⁸ But perhaps what the parliamentary radicals wanted was simply to embarrass Duan. When one member was asked why he put forward an impeachment bill which had little chance of success, he remarked that "the mere fact that it is officially recorded in the minutes of Parliament that such and such a bill against such and such a person was entered for discussion on such and such a day is enough to leave a record of 'offensive smell' unto thousand of years for the person concerned".⁶⁹

Duan must have been horrified by the intensity of the attack he faced, but even under these trying circumstances, he stood by the Republic and the parliamentary system. The restoration of the *PC* in mid-1916 was from the very beginning greeted with dismay by many of the regional militarists in the country. Led by the military governor of Anhui, Zhang Xun, they began to form an alliance to criticize the parliament and its Guomindang members.⁷⁰ To these military generals, the present parliament could not represent the people's opinion because it was elected years ago.⁷¹ Furthermore, this parliament had been factious and unproductive, and for the good of

⁶⁸This was precisely the problem Li faced when he tried to dismiss Duan in May, 1917.

⁶⁹*Peking Gazette*, 30 November, 1916.

⁷⁰See Li, *Minguoshi*, pp.42-47.

⁷¹See his letter to the Premier and the President in September, 1916, Lai, *Beiyang*, 3:433.

the country, there was a need to dissolve it and hold new elections.⁷² This clamor reached its climax in December, 1916, when the parliament was disgraced by the incident in which its members fought among themselves during a debate over the proper powers the provinces should have under the new constitution.⁷³ Surprisingly, Duan remained supportive of the parliament in the midst of all this. Duan could conceivably have used these attacks to intimidate his parliamentary rivals, and there were indeed suspicions that he was responsible for instigating these attacks in the first place, yet there was no solid evidence that he ever actually pursued such a course.⁷⁴ On the contrary, more than once he warned his military colleagues that it was not their role to be involved in politics, and that their attacks on the parliamentary institution would do the country no good.⁷⁵ Part of the credit for Duan's behavior must go to Liang Qichao, who had always advised Duan to take the moderate course. To be sure, Duan did privately consider the option of dissolving parliament in January and again in March 1917, but Liang Qichao was able to persuade him not to do so.⁷⁶ Duan, indeed, had chosen to compromise and work within the system rather than to confront his opponents.

⁷²See Hu Pingsheng, *Minguo chunian de fubipai*, p.156.

⁷³Li, *Minguoshi*, p.41; Hu, *Fubipai*, p.165.

⁷⁴There was no evidence that Duan ever aligned himself with Zhang: see Hu, *Fupipai*. In fact, when Zhang objected to Duan's war policy in March, 1917, he and his associates even tried to topple Duan's cabinet: see the letter from Zhang's associate, Tang Baoe, to Zhang on 4 March, 1917. Shi, "Zhang Xun", pp.24-26.

⁷⁵For instance, in October, 1916 after Zhang launched his attacks: see *Shibao*, 4 October, 1916, p.2.

⁷⁶See the Japanese intelligence report on 9 January, 1917 in Zhang, *Beiyang*, 3:49-50.

The Issue of War Participation

But the issue of China's participation in the World War was to unleash all these existing tensions to a point beyond control. When America severed its relations with Germany in late January, 1917 in protest against Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare, Paul Reinsch, the American ambassador in Beijing, tried to induce the Chinese government to follow suit.⁷⁷ At this point neither Li Yuanhong nor Duan Qirui was enthusiastic about this.⁷⁸ There was a prevalent belief among contemporaries about the invincibility of Germany, and neither Li nor Duan saw the need to get China involved in a war which they felt China might not win. Furthermore, there was the fear that China's participation in the War would mean that Japan could now legitimately expand its influence in China in the name of the war effort. But the situation began to change when Reinsch gave assurances to the Chinese government that America would take China under its protective wings should China fall in line with American policy. While Reinsch was not able to make definite commitments as to what China would reap out of the War, he nevertheless gave indications that China might be admitted to full membership in any future peace conference, and that it might even be possible for a major portion of Boxer Indemnity be directed to China to fund her financial needs.⁷⁹

The result of this was Duan's decision to follow America's lead in early February to issue a protest to Germany threatening to break off diplomatic relations

⁷⁷For details, see Shao, *Tuan*, pp.187-191.

⁷⁸See the memoirs of Wu Jinglian in Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.89.

⁷⁹Shao, *Tuan*, pp.189-192.

unless Germany abandoned its submarine warfare. At this particular point Duan did not face much opposition from Li, even though privately Li had his reservations toward the decision. After all, China was not declaring war on Germany, at least not yet. Nor did Duan face any significant opposition when he went to explain his policy in person before the parliament. The Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, Wu Tingfang, who was a former Guomindang member, actually said that the Cabinet did not have any constitutional obligation to consult the parliament on this decision, since China was only breaking off relations with, and not declaring war on, Germany. In fact, it was Duan who insisted on putting the matter before the parliament.⁸⁰ It is true that some parliamentary members severely criticized Duan for failing to consult them earlier, yet they overwhelmingly endorsed his decision.⁸¹

But decision to protest against Germany was to trigger off a series of debates on China's proper role in the War, the result of which was the polarization of attitudes within the political arena. In the weeks after the protest, Duan was increasingly in favor of declaring war on Germany, and much of this had to do with the influence of his close political associate, Liang Qichao.⁸² To Liang, America's invitation was a great opportunity for China to assert its international position, even if America could not give China any concrete promises as to what China could reap from a possible victory. Furthermore, if China was to remain neutral, Sino-American relations would suffer, and China would be left helplessly alone in any future fight against foreign

⁸⁰See the eye-witness account of Xu Tian, in Xu Tian, "Dui deao canzhan", *Jindaishi ziliao* (1954:2), p.65.

⁸¹Shao, *Tuan*, p.192. Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.91.

⁸²This was according to Duan's close associate: Zeng, "Maodun", p.263.

encroachment. So to Liang, there was much to gain to join the War, and as much to lose if China was to remain neutral.⁸³

On the other end, Sun Yatsen was campaigning equally rigorously against China's entry to the War. In his famous tract *The Question of China's Survival*, Sun stated that China had everything to lose in joining the war. Sun strongly believed that Germany would win, and in any case, Sun believed that China did not have the military or financial strength to participate in any international war.⁸⁴ This position was, not surprisingly, wholly endorsed by the parliamentary radicals, who issued a statement in late February. In this statement, the radicals, led by Ma Junwu, listed the reasons why China could not afford a war: financial insufficiency, internal disorder, the threat from the Moslems, the threat of submarine warfare, the unlikelihood of reaping any benefits even in an Entente victory, and the necessity of paying more attention to internal affairs. In their view, those who tried to advocate a war policy were "rascals trying to stir up trouble".⁸⁵

Up to this point, however, Duan still had the situation under control. Through Liang Qichao he was able to persuade many anti-war politicians to his side.⁸⁶ Through intense lobbying, Duan was also able to persuade the majority of parliamentary members to vote for the severance of relations with Germany in mid-March. Even Guomindang moderates, who were usually suspicious of Duan's intentions, cast their

⁸³Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, pp.142-145.

⁸⁴Sun Zhongshan quanji, 3:39-99. To be sure, this was published only in May, 1917, but Sun's arguments were well-known before that.

⁸⁵Quoted in Ding, *Liang Qichao*, p.811.

⁸⁶Ding, *Liang Qichao*, pp.807-808.

vote for Duan, because they felt the policy was for the national good.⁸⁷ As a result, granted that some Guomindang radicals fought hard against Duan's policy,⁸⁸ and granted that during the actual debate on the question the situation was so chaotic that even the Speaker was hustled out of his seat, no serious damage to Duan's policy was done. On 10 March, the House of Representatives passed Duan's policy by 330 to 88, and the Senate did so by 159 to 35.⁸⁹

But for Duan this was only the beginning of a long battle. The fact that China had now decided to break off relations with Germany did not automatically mean that China would declare war on Germany. As Duan found out, he would meet intense opposition when he tried to implement the latter, and all the constitutional tensions which had been kept in check between he and President Li on the one hand, and between he and the parliament on the other, would resurface in this political struggle. Under the *PC*, it was not clear who in the government had the final say in deciding whether China should go to war. Article 35 specifically said that the President should be the person responsible for declaring war, but it was not clear whether he himself was solely responsible for the decision, or whether the Premier and the Cabinet should decide it on his behalf. It was not a secret that Li was all along opposed to China being involved in the War.⁹⁰ In fact, when Duan asked Li to sign an order concerning breaking off relations with Germany in early March, Li refused, and insisted that it was

⁸⁷Wu Jinglian was a good example. He himself acknowledged that he was usually anti-Duan, but he and his associates supported Duan on this issue: Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, pp.92-93.

⁸⁸See the Japanese intelligence report in Nihon Gaimusho ed., *Nihon gaiko bunsho*, Taisho no.14, p.654.

⁸⁹*Shibao*, 13 March, 1917, p.2; Shao, *Tuan*, p.205.

⁹⁰Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, p.649; Xu, "Deao", pp.61-64.

within his prerogative to decide on these issues. It was reported that in response one of Duan's associates angrily shouted at Li's secretary, saying, "who are you to refuse!"⁹¹ Even though Li eventually backed down on this occasion, the affair dramatically heightened tensions between the Cabinet and the President's office, and reopened the debate concerning the balance of power between the two offices.

To Li, it was well within his responsibility to play a major role in matters such as foreign policy, and this was why even though Duan repeatedly pressed him to fall in line with Cabinet policy after the parliamentary vote in March, he still refused to give in. In fact, Li made his objections to the war policy public, and was apparently convinced of his mission to prevent China from entering the War. It was reported that Li told Duan that he objected to war because he believed he was "representing public opinion".⁹²

To Duan, however, Li was grossly overstepping his authority as President. This is very apparent from an article in the pro-Duan newspaper *True Republicanism* in early April 1917. The author started by saying that Duan had been good to Li all along, and emphasized the fact that it was Duan who helped Li to become President in the first place. He lamented, however, that there were now people around Li who tried to expand the power of the President's office against the stipulations of the PC. He remarked that this was dangerous, because it meant undermining the whole Cabinet system of government. The author ended by giving a thinly disguised warning to Li

⁹¹Zhang, "Neige", p.181.

⁹²Xu, "Deao", p.68.

that he would do himself no good if he was to fight with the Cabinet.⁹³ Li, however, did not listen to the advise, but in fact even tried to align himself with the military general in Manchuria, Zhang Zuolin, and hoped to use Zhang to topple Duan's Cabinet. To Duan, Li was not only abusing his power as President, but was also playing politics to strengthen his own position.⁹⁴

Furthermore, Li soon aligned himself with the radicals in the parliament to fight against Duan's policy.⁹⁵ Article 35 stipulated that parliamentary approval must be sought before any declaration of war, and Duan had been very careful to follow this. After their defeat in the March vote on the severance of relations with Germany, the radicals, led by members of parliament like Ma Junwu and Zou Lu, became very active in lobbying against China's entry to the War. And they were starting to gain the support of fellow members of the parliament.⁹⁶ While the moderate elements of parliament were willing to break off relations with Germany, as evidenced by the vote in March, they were rather reluctant to commit to a war effort, especially when Duan was not able to exact definite assurances from the powers as to what China would get in return.⁹⁷ Furthermore, rumors were beginning to surface that Duan's sole purpose in entering the War was to strengthen himself militarily.⁹⁸ This was why when the

⁹³Danganguan, *Huibian*, 3:1204-1205

⁹⁴Xu, "Deao", p.69. It was no coincidence that Duan and his associates started to plan to topple Li after this.

⁹⁵Zeng, "Maodun", 1:264; Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, p.654.

⁹⁶Zou Lu conceded that many fellow Guomindang members were originally pro-war, and they changed sides only after being intensely lobbied. Zou also admitted that he was under the influence of Sun Yatsen: Zou, *Huigulu*, 1:103-104.

⁹⁷Shao, *Tuan*, pp.205-206.

⁹⁸Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, pp.96-97. Wu was obviously bothered by these rumors.

Senate proceeded to discuss the war question on May 8, it was the opponents of the war policy who dominated the forum. It is perhaps not surprising that it was Ding Shiyi, the former private secretary of Li Yuanhong who had earlier battled with Duan over the President's prerogatives, who was the most vocal in the debate. Holding a copy of Liang Qichao's *Discourse on Foreign Policy* in one hand, Ding made a point-by-point critique of Liang's pro-war arguments.⁹⁹ The fact that it was Ding who was making the rebuttal was perhaps appropriately symbolic. The struggle over the war question had, indeed, become intertwined with the constitutional debate on the respective powers of the President, the Premier and the parliament.

It is in this light that we should examine the infamous incident of 10 May, in which Duan's associates sent a group of hooligans to the parliamentary building in an attempt to intimidate members of the House of Representatives into approving China's entry to the War. It is not clear whether Duan himself knew of the incident beforehand, but in any case he stood by his associates' actions, even though they caused an outcry and turned public opinion overwhelmingly against him.¹⁰⁰ Why did someone who worked for compromise during his tenure as Premier now support such drastic measures? The problem for China at that time was that it was facing a serious constitutional crisis. There were an elected body of parliamentary members and a President who were bitterly opposed to China joining the War on the one hand, and there were a Premier and his responsible Cabinet who were determined to see it happen on the other. The situation had become so polarized that neither side would back down, and the *PC* unfortunately gave no specific directions as to who should

⁹⁹"Xuanzhanan yu zhengqiao", *Xinqingnian* III:4 (1 June, 1917), pp.1-7.

¹⁰⁰Most accounts say that Duan instigated the incident, although Duan's close associate, Zeng Yujun, believed that Duan did not know about it beforehand: Zeng, "Maodun", 1:264.

have the final say should such deadlock occur. In retrospect, Duan's actions, while totally unconstitutional, were aimed at resolving a question which the constitution provided no answers and which constitutional channels could not resolve. Duan believed that as Premier, he should be in charge. He felt, perhaps justifiably, that many of the attacks from the parliament were pure party politics aimed at discrediting him and his government. Indeed, in a conversation with Paul Reinsch in late May, Duan "protested his desire to work with the President and Parliament", but had found the attitude of Parliament "become well-nigh impossible".¹⁰¹ Perhaps after months of compromising, Duan's patience for working *within* the system had finally run out.

July 1917

It is with this in mind, I believe, that we should analyze Duan's actions in July 1917, which triggered the *hufa* movement and resulted in years of civil war. It is only within this context that we can sympathize with Duan's determination not to recall the old parliament, because to him a recall would only mean the resumption of the political chaos of 1916-1917. It also explains why Duan wanted to call a Provisional Senate to write new parliamentary laws which would reduce the size of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, because Duan believed that a reduction in size would render future parliaments more orderly and less prone to the intense party rivalries which we see in 1916-1917.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹USDS 893.00/2675 Reinsch to the Secretary of State, 14 June, 1917, p.2.

¹⁰²Li shared the belief that the size of the parliament needed to be reduced as well: see Reinsch, *American Diplomat*, p.199.

But what is illuminating about Duan's actions in July 1917 was not as much what he did but what he did not choose to do. Hailed as the hero who saved the Republic from the Manchus, Duan could essentially have done anything he wished at that time. He could easily have persecuted his Guomindang opponents, just as Yuan Shikai had in 1913-1914. But not only did he not pursue such a course, he in fact tried hard to accommodate his parliamentary rivals and lure them away from the *hufa* movement in Guangdong.¹⁰³ He could conceivably have rewritten the *PC* in a way to give himself dictatorial powers, but neither did he do this. The fact that he did not try to amend the *PC* to make it more specific concerning the powers of the President was to give him trouble in the months ahead, when the new President Feng Guozhang took advantage of the same ambiguities to challenge Duan's position.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Duan still preferred to work within the existing *PC*, and hoped to call a parliament which would quickly complete a new constitution that would replace the *PC* and resolve the constitutional problems in hand.

Therefore, the conventional view that Duan's actions in 1917 indicate a course of authoritarianism is misleading. It is evident that he could easily have done so much more for himself at that time. His refusal to recall the parliament and invite Li back as President, and his move to reduce the size of future parliaments, were no doubt intended to serve his own interests as well. Yet it is equally clear that the political arrangement as it was in 1916-1917 could not work, and that there would only be further chaos if Duan was to restore the old system and the parliament as Sun Yatsen

¹⁰³Duan tried to persuade Guomidang members of parliament not to go to Guangdong with financial incentives: see Shen Taixian, "Lueshu guohui huifu he feichang guohui de qingkuang", *Wenshi Ziliao* 82:203-204.

¹⁰⁴For that, see Li, *Political History*, pp.378-383.

advocated in Guangdong. Duan's actions in July 1917 were a forceful and probably unconstitutional solution to the deadlock in early 1917, but it was a solution nonetheless.¹⁰⁵

This essay also shows the reason why despite the best of intentions from all sides in June 1916, the political situation could still have deteriorated so rapidly within a year's time. It is true that Yuan Shikai's regime had left deep fissures in the political arena which could not be easily bridged overnight. After all, many members of the 1916-1917 parliament were only recently branded as public enemies by Duan and his associates. But the key reason why these old animosities could resurface so quickly and so viciously was, I would argue, the consequence of unresolved constitutional questions in the political arena. That the *PC* as a document was so ambiguous reflected the fact there was yet to be a consensus among Chinese leaders and politicians on how power should be shared under the new constitutional system. Indeed, as we have seen, even the revolutionaries themselves shifted positions to adjust to the changing political circumstances. These ambiguities were to haunt the Republic, because they not only provided old rivals a perfect setting for battle, but more importantly, they endowed those rivalries with *a sense of legitimacy*. In the eyes of the participants, their political struggle took on the aura of being a struggle for the constitution. If to Duan all his actions in 1916-1917 were entirely constitutional and that it was the parliamentary members and President Li who were overstepping their

¹⁰⁵This was the stance which Duan and Liang Qichao took. Liang clearly recognized that his actions were not entirely constitutional, but he believed they were close enough, and they could serve China well: see Ding, *Liang Qichao*, pp.830-832.

authorities and disregarding national interests,¹⁰⁶ to Li and the Guomindang radicals, it was Duan who was seriously infringing on the *PC*.

It is in this light that we may appreciate how deep in trouble the Chinese Republic actually was even before Duan became the Premier in mid-1916, and what the origins of the constitutional crisis in 1917 were. By failing to draw up a permanent constitution immediately after the Revolution of 1911, the revolutionaries gave up the golden opportunity of being the lone architects of a constitution which would define specifically the constitutional system they wanted China to have. The revolutionaries would not have that opportunity again, not only because their rivals would soon challenge their ideals, but also because the whole process of drafting a new constitution would itself become entrapped in the factional politics of the day. If in 1913 the supporters of Yuan Shikai would always try to enhance the power of the President in the new constitution, this was the same for the radical parliamentarians in 1917 who would always support measures which would enhance parliamentary authority.¹⁰⁷ The result of this was that a constitution which was expected to be finished by 1913 was in fact not finished until 1923.

This would have been all right if the *PC*, intended originally as a temporary document, was specific enough in outlining how the constitutional system should function, but as I have shown earlier, the *PC* was not. The result of this was that the *PC* not only failed to help politicians to regulate and settle their political conflicts via constitutional means, the *PC* itself tragically became the breeding ground of conflict.

¹⁰⁶Reinsch, *American Diplomat*, p.263.

¹⁰⁷For the debates on the drafting of a new constitution in 1913, see Zhang, *Zhengdang*, chp.5.

While it is true that Republican politicians took advantage of the ambiguities of the constitution to advance their personal agenda and discredit their opponents, what is equally important is that the constitutional question itself served to further inflame existing rivalries and polarize the political arena. Viewed in this light, perhaps it is not surprising that the Republic would face a constitutional crisis as it did in July 1917. The problem did not primarily lie on the behavior of individual politicians like Duan Qirui, Sun Yatsen, Li Yuanhong, or Zou Lu. Rather it lay on the collective failure of Republican politicians to come to a consensus concerning what kind of constitutional arrangement China should have. And as they had found out, as the question became more and more politicized, a consensus likewise became more and more elusive despite the best of intentions.

Chapter Two:

Sun Yatsen and the Hufa Movement of 1917-1919: His Goals, Strategies and His Enemies

Duan's actions in mid-1917 were to have serious consequences, because they would split the nation for the next few years. On 17 July 1917, Sun Yatsen delivered the now famous speech on "protecting the constitution" (*hufa*) in Canton, Guangdong. Interestingly enough, Sun agreed with Duan that there were serious problems in the constitutional system as it stood, although Sun's diagnosis of the problem was naturally very different. To Sun, the trouble with the present system was that military men, like Duan Qirui, had usurped the power rightfully belonged to civilians and civilian institutions. Sun argued that China had reached a turning point in its history. As he put it, the fight for the Chinese Republic was a fight between the true republicans and the "pseudo-republicans". Unless and until "pseudo-republicanism" was eradicated, true republicanism would not emerge, and no permanent peace would dawn on China. To wage this battle, Sun established a military government in Canton in August, and launched the so-called *hufa* movement against the Beijing government of Duan Qirui.¹⁰⁸

But the *hufa* movement was much more than a fight against Duan's attempt to revise the constitution. Conventionally historians have seen the movement as a *defensive* movement; they have interpreted it as a direct response of Sun to Duan Qirui's refusal to reconvene the old parliament of 1916-1917 after Zhang Xun's coup,

¹⁰⁸ 17 June 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:114-115.

and Duan's subsequent attempt to revise the electoral laws.¹⁰⁹ Yet even a cursory look at the chronology of events will tell us that this could not be the case, because Duan did not announce his intention of calling a new parliament until late July, when Sun had already made the speech on *hufa*. But if Sun's *hufa* movement was not in response to Duan's actions in late July, then what was it all about? To establish the precise origins of the *hufa* movement, because this would not only help us to appreciate the true nature of Sun's effort, but also Sun's political intentions behind the launching of this movement in the first place. If, as I have explained in chapter one, Duan Qirui did not arrive at the idea of constitutional revisions in July 1917 overnight, likewise Sun launched the *hufa* movement with serious thought and preparation beforehand. As we shall see, for Sun, the struggle for the constitution started before Duan's drastic actions in July 1917.

The need to study Sun's activities in the 1910s is the more urgent when one realizes that this is without doubt the least studied period of his political career. The reason for this relative lack of attention may be due to the fact that if compared with the 1900s, when Sun was the leader of the Tongmenghui, and if compared with the 1920s, when Sun reorganized the Guomindang and laid the groundwork for a future Northern expedition, the 1910s was a lackluster period for Sun.¹¹⁰ But as I will show, the late 1910s was an important period in Sun's life, because it can provide us with the context to comprehend Sun's behavior in the 1920s. More importantly, the late 1910s was illuminating because it was politically a difficult period for Sun. My purpose is to

¹⁰⁹See for instance, Andrew Nathan's very influential work, *Peking Politics 1918-1923*, pp.91-92.

¹¹⁰There are few English works which analyze Sun's activities in the 1910s, with the exception of E. Friedman, *Backward Toward Revolution*. But Friedman's account ends in 1916, and there is no serious work on the *hufa* period.

detail the frustrations Sun encountered during this period, and examine how Sun responded to the many occasions when his lofty goals were compromised by the harsh realities he faced.

The Origins of Hufa

On 1 July the military general Zhang Xun abolished the Republic and restored the Manchu monarchy. In response, Sun hosted a secret meeting with his associates in his residence in Shanghai, attended by Commander Cheng Biguang of the Chinese navy and a number of eminent Guomindang members. To save the Republic from Zhang Xun, they agreed there was a need to quickly reestablish the republican government dissolved by Zhang. Soon Sun decided to move his headquarters from Shanghai to Canton, and hence within a few days he embarked on a trip to the South, accompanied by some of his closest associates and a number of parliamentary members.¹¹¹

Well before Zhang's attempt to restore the Manchus, Sun had already explored the possibility of launching a rebellion against the Beijing government, although

¹¹¹Tang Zhijun ed., *Zhang Taiyan xiansheng nianpu changbian* 1:567. Commander Cheng was a keen supporter of President Li in his struggle with Duan in the spring of 1917. In face of a possible coup by Duan in late May, he tried to persuade Li to go to Shanghai with him. Li did not, and so Cheng led some of the naval ships to Shanghai himself. See the first-hand account by Yin Shouhua et. al. "Haijun nanxia hufa shimo", *Sun Zhongshan sanci zai Guangdong jianli zhengquan* eds. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi quanguo weiyuanhui et.al., p.40. Only part of the navy went down, and they did not go to Canton together with Sun: see Tang Ruixiang, "Haijun nanxia hufa ruogan wenti de kaobian", *Sun Zhongshan yu hufa haijun lunji*, pp.18-26.

Zhang's actions certainly helped to bring Sun's plans to fruition.¹¹² As early as October 1916, Sun already remarked that he was ready to rebel against the Beijing government headed by Duan Qirui, because he believed it was "dictatorial" and was "selling out Chinese interests to the imperialists".¹¹³ Sun's frustration reached a climax when in the spring of 1917, Duan tried to forcefully push through parliament a bill which would commit China to the World War.¹¹⁴ Sun was outraged not only because he was opposed to China's entry into the war,¹¹⁵ but also because he was disturbed by Duan's dictatorial style of government. Sun's resentment toward Duan grew further when Duan instructed his supporters in the provinces to declare their independence against President Li and the parliament, with the clear intention of intimidating Li and the members into compliance.¹¹⁶

It was these developments which helped Sun to make up his mind to start a rebellion against Beijing, presumably following the example of the anti-Yuan movement in 1916.¹¹⁷ From late May onward Sun started to write letters to the regional warlords in the South, namely Tang Jiyao of Yunnan and Lu Rongting of Guangdong and Guangxi, advising them to declare independence against Duan and the

¹¹²Sun was sending his supporters to Canton and Shanghai in April and May to coordinate an effort against Duan. See Luo Yiqun, "Youguan Zhonghua gemingdang huodong zhi huiyi", *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* 25:95.

¹¹³This is according to Hu Hanmin. See Chen, *Nianpu changbian*, 1:1010.

¹¹⁴See his telegram to the members of parliament on 20 May 1917, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:33-35.

¹¹⁵See Sun's polemic advocating China's non-participation in the world war called "Zhongguo cunwang wenti", *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 4:39-99.

¹¹⁶See Sun's telegram to Lu Rongting and Tang Jiyao, 6 June 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:101.

¹¹⁷See for instance, Sun's telegram to Lu and his associates on 8 June 1917. In this telegram Sun talked about the need to launch a Northern expedition to protect the Republic, although he did not specifically mention the possibility of a rival government in the South: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:101-102.

military.¹¹⁸ To drum up support for his plans, Sun sent his close associate, Hu Hanmin, to Guangdong for the specific purpose of negotiating with Lu about the possibility of launching a rebellion in Canton.¹¹⁹ Simultaneously in Shanghai Sun started to lobby for support. His chief priority was to solicit the backing of Cheng Biguang. On a number of occasions Sun discussed his plans with Cheng and tried to persuade Cheng to support his effort. He even gave Cheng 300,000 yuan unconditionally to show his goodwill to the navy.¹²⁰

At this point Sun's effort was not *exactly* about protecting the constitution, except in the most general sense. By late May no specific constitutional law had been broken, and Sun could only accuse Duan of having violated the spirit of constitutional rule by using coercion to achieve his purposes. Even Sun could not, and did not, say that Duan had broken any specific article of the Provisional Constitution.¹²¹ But the focus of Sun's effort changed in early June when rumors began to surface that President Li, under the advice of Zhang Xun, was about to dissolve parliament, an act which in the end took place on 13 June. Although no clause in the Provisional Constitution explicitly prohibited the President from dissolving parliament, there was neither any clause which granted the President such authority either. In addition, the fact that Cabinet ministers like Wu Tingfang stubbornly refused to countersign such a

¹¹⁸See Chen, *Nianpu changbian*, 1:1027-1029.

¹¹⁹This is according to a follower of Sun, Luo Qunyi, "Ji Sunzhongshan nanxia Guangdong jianli zhengquan", *Sun Zhongshan sanci* ed. Weiyuanhui, p.3.

¹²⁰Yin, "Haijun", pp.40-41.

¹²¹See Sun's speech on 17 June 1917 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:114-115. The only specific attack on Duan's actions was his failure to punish Zhang Xun after his attempt to restore the Manchus, but this was clearly unrelated to the constitution: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:118, 19 July 1917.

measure only further heightened the sense of illegality surrounding the dissolution.¹²² These developments suddenly gave Sun's movement a very specific *raison d'être*, as now it became an effort with the concrete goal of protecting the parliamentary institution and the Provisional Constitution. Of course, when Zhang Xun restored the Manchus in early July, Sun's movement was given an added sense of purpose.

It is only with this background that one can understand why Sun vouched to continue his *hufa* effort even after Duan crushed Zhang's attempt and reestablished the Republic. If the Republican system was now restored, why was there still the need to continue the movement? The explanation for this is that Sun did not launch the *hufa* movement simply to *protect* the Republican system or the parliamentary institution. What Sun wanted to accomplish was something more drastic and fundamental. Sun had plainly lost faith in the military's goodwill in upholding the ideals of the Republic. He made it clear that he wanted to recreate a Republic in which the military would be relegated to a subordinate position.

This is apparent when one examines the speeches Sun made in July and August of 1917. In these speeches Sun painted a stark black-and-white picture of the current political situation. In Sun's eyes, for instance, there were only two kinds of politicians in the Republic: the true republicans and the "pseudo-republicans". There was, therefore, not much to differentiate someone like Duan Qirui from Zhang Xun, because to Sun both of them were enemies of the Republic. Both of them were at heart "restorationists" (*fubipai*), ready to betray the Republic as soon as the

¹²²Li, *Minguoshi* no.2 vol.2, pp.72-73.

opportunity presented itself.¹²³ To Sun, Duan's record in the past year as Premier vividly demonstrated how little respect he had for the constitution and the republican system.¹²⁴ Sun's solution to the present political turmoil was a radical one: military men and other pseudo-republicans like Duan had to "punished and swept away" before a true Republic could emerge in China.¹²⁵ As Sun himself said, he wanted a "fundamental solution" to the present situation.¹²⁶

So what motivated Sun to launch his *hufa* movement were essentially not specific constitutional infringements committed by politicians or military generals like Duan Qirui. While Sun did condemn Duan for allegedly "illegally" reclaiming the premiership after the Zhang Xun affair, this was not at all Sun's main point of accusation against Duan.¹²⁷ Sun attacked Duan not because Duan had broken any particular article of the Provisional Constitution. Rather, Sun's attack was a *holistic* critique against the style of the Beijing government as it stood in July 1917. Sun lamented the fact that Duan and his associates had perverted the republican system, and "had practised autocracy behind the facade of republicanism".¹²⁸ The means to establish a new form of constitutional rule was *via* a military revolution: Sun wanted

¹²³See his talk with the reporters in Guangdong on 31 July 1917 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:126-128.

¹²⁴See his condemnation of Duan Qirui on 19 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:116-117.

¹²⁵See Sun's speech before Guangdong's academic community on 21 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:122.

¹²⁶Quoted in *Changsha dagongbao* 29 July 1917, p.3.

¹²⁷See Sun's telegram on 19 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:117. Duan was dismissed from office by President Li in late May. After Duan crushed Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus, he claimed he had received the reappointment of Li, something not disputed by Li. Sun questioned the legality of this reappointment, and said that Duan provided no proof that Li indeed reappointed him. But even Sun could not categorically say that Duan's premiership was illegal.

¹²⁸Sun's speech on 17 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:114.

to establish a rival government in the South, and then launch a military expedition to overturn the present Beijing government.¹²⁹

This also explains the puzzling fact why Sun was actually pleased to hear the news that Zhang Xun had dismantled the republican system and restored the Manchus in early July 1917. To Sun, the constitutional system as it stood on the eve of the restoration was a mockery of the republican spirit anyway, and so he was pleased to be given a powerful pretext now to rebel against Beijing and bring about the wholesale changes he had hoped for.¹³⁰ Viewed in this light, Sun's *hufa* movement actually shared a great deal of common ground with the 1911 Revolution, at least in terms of aspirations. If in 1911 Sun believed that the Manchus must be swept aside before any hopes of a new Republic could be realized, likewise in 1917 Sun believed that the militarists be removed before true republicanism could come to China. As Sun said, "since previous revolutions did not achieve the original goals, there was a need for a further revolution!"¹³¹

Sun's Strategies and Priorities

This understanding is very important, because the nature of the *hufa* movement had serious implications on the strategies Sun would choose to attain his goals.

¹²⁹See Tang, *Zhang Taiyan* 1:548. Zhang's account is invaluable, because he was with Sun all the time when Sun launched the movement, and his account is less tainted by subsequent political reconstruction than other memoirs are.

¹³⁰Quoted in Liu Deze, "Zhonghua gemingdang waiji", *Geming wenxian* 49:134.

Firstly, it explains why Sun was reluctant to strike any compromise with Beijing even when there was the opportunity. Sun was already very reluctant when he compromised with Duan Qirui after Yuan's death in mid-1916,¹³² and he was sure that he would not want to make the same "mistake" again. Secondly, Sun's determination in reaching his goals made him willing to pursue whatever policies which would help his movement, including those which were of suspect legality. While in Sun's eyes these measures might just be expedient moves for the ultimate good of the Republic, his critics and even his friends were to find it difficult to accept the fact that despite the name of Sun's movement, he himself was constantly dancing along the lines of constitutional illegalities.

This was nowhere more apparent than when the question regarding whether the *hufa* activists should establish a new government, and if so, who the president of that government should be, surfaced in early July. When Sun met with Commander Cheng, members of parliament, and various leaders of the Guomindang in Shanghai, Sun boldly proclaimed his desire to establish a new provisional government immediately, and unashamedly indicated that he wanted to serve as the provisional president.¹³³ Sun obviously believed that in order to drum up support for his movement, there was a need to establish a new government and elect a president to serve as focal points of the movement. Sun's friends and allies, however, saw things differently. Tang Shaoyi, a close associate of Sun and an elder statesman of the Guomindang, believed that granted Zhang's government was illegal, but to establish a provisional government was an act which would be equally unconstitutional. He

¹³²See his letter on 5 July 1916, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:316.

¹³³This was according to the eye-witness account of Zhang Binglin: Tang, *Zhang Taiyan* 1:567.

therefore advised Sun to reestablish the government dissolved by Zhang, and invite President Li to continue to serve as its head.¹³⁴ As one commentator concurred, Sun's proposal would have been as unconstitutional as Zhang Xun's restoration of the Manchus.¹³⁵ One of Sun's associates further pointed out that if Sun was to become the provisional president, Sun would give the wrong impression to the public that he was merely working for his own honor.¹³⁶

Sun initially stood his ground despite the strong opposition, and it was not until Commander Cheng threatened to withdraw his support that Sun softened his stance. Cheng apparently did not comment on Sun's proposal directly during the meeting, but insisted that the navy would join the movement only if three preconditions were satisfied: that the Provisional Constitution be protected; that the parliament be protected; and that the legal president be supported. In plain language, Cheng was saying that he would not support a move which was unconstitutional, and it is not hard to see what he was referring to. Indeed, it was not until Sun assured Cheng that he would not do anything illegal that Cheng signed a pact with Sun giving Sun his support.¹³⁷

¹³⁴Tang, *Zhang Taiyan* 1:567.

¹³⁵According to a letter of Zhang Junli to Liang Qichao on 13 July 1917, some of Sun's supporters argued that Sun agreed to resign as provisional president in 1911 only because Emperor Xuantong promised to step down. Now that Xuantong was restored, so it was proper that Sun should regain the presidency. See the letter in Ding, *Liang Qichao*, pp.827-828.

¹³⁶Tang, *Zhang Taiyan* 1:548. This was why even though the editors of the newspaper *Changsha dagongbao* respected Sun as the revolutionary hero of 1911, they believed there was simply no constitutional ground for Sun to establish a new government. 17 July 1917, p.2.

¹³⁷Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, pp.113-115. This was also why Cheng was not happy when Sun established a military government in late August. See Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.124.

This open disregard for constitutional procedures by the leader of a movement entitled *hufa* is no doubt ironic, but it does not necessarily indicate that Sun was hypocritical in his intentions. On the contrary, the fact that Sun *openly* declared his intention of wishing to become the provisional president is very telling. Sun must have known very well that this move could arouse the suspicions of the public and give further proof to the accusation that he was as a mere opportunist. The fact that Sun still pushed forward with this idea shows not only how strong Sun's sense of mission was, but also how disappointed he was with the present political set-up in Beijing. Sun clearly believed that the task of *hufa* was so urgent that it called for expedient measures if necessary. Constitutional technicalities, as Sun said explicitly, should not "constrain one's actions in these desperate times".¹³⁸

What Sun did in the second half of 1917 was not an aberration, but rather a continuation, of his political activities since the early years of the Republic. Ever since Yuan Shikai dissolved parliament in mid-1913, Sun had worked to carry out another revolution to topple the militarists and rebuild the Republic. In 1913, he launched the so-called Second Revolution, but his effort aroused little support even among Guomindang members and the parliamentarians. As Sun himself wrote in disgust, "There wasn't one party man killed in the battles of the Second Revolution".¹³⁹ In 1916, there was the successful anti-monarchical (*huguo*) movement which in the end toppled Yuan Shikai's regime, but Sun only played a peripheral role in this effort. It was, instead, Liang Qichao and his student Cai E, the military governor of Yunnan,

¹³⁸See his public telegram on 4 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:111.

¹³⁹Quoted in Deng Zeru, *Zhongguo guomindang ershinian shiji*, p.134.

who took the lead in the fight against Yuan.¹⁴⁰ As a consequence of this, Sun lacked any leverage in influencing the political arrangement in the immediate post-Yuan era. The result was that even though Yuan was now gone, Duan Qirui became the Premier in July 1916, and the Northern militarists remained very powerful within the political arena.

So the *hufa* movement was Sun's third attempt in five years to carry out a revolution which he hoped would create a new Republic. Sun was more determined than ever to be successful this time. If, as I have described in chapter one, the events in 1916-1917 had convinced Duan Qirui that he could not work with Sun and his Guomindang associates, likewise those events convinced Sun that unless and until people like Duan were removed, no true constitutional rule could be established in China. Sun felt the urgency of a wholesale change in the political arena after Duan's actions over the war participation question, and it was from then on that Sun openly condemned Duan as a "pseudo-republican".¹⁴¹ Obviously Sun thought that his schism with the militarists had reached a point of no return.

Sun's Troubles in the 1910s

If the *hufa* movement needed Sun as a leader, Sun likewise needed the *hufa* movement as a way to reassert his presence in the political arena. Even though Sun was the revolutionary hero of the 1911 Revolution, his political fortunes sank

¹⁴⁰D. Sutton, *Provincial Militarism and the Chinese Republic*, chp.9.

¹⁴¹See his various speeches in July 1917 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*.

drastically after the establishment of the Republic. The failure of the Second Revolution was a big setback to Sun, and it prompted Sun to reorganize the Guomindang and establish a more tight-knitted revolutionary organization called the Chinese Revolutionary Party (*Zhonghua Gemingdang*). This new party was nevertheless ineffective from its inception, not only because key members of the Guomindang, including the elder statesman Huang Xing, refused to join, but also because the party had no money to launch any serious rebellion against Yuan's regime.¹⁴²

Sun's reputation was to suffer another serious blow during Japan's presentation of the Twenty-One Demands in 1915. To fight against these demands, Yuan wanted to rally the country behind him to generate popular pressure against the Japanese government. Yuan called for all parties to set aside their differences in face of the national crisis, and he sponsored anti-Japanese protests in major Chinese cities. It was hoped that a show of the force of anti-Japanese feelings in China would compel the Japanese government to withdraw its demands. Many Guomindang members, for patriotic reasons, supported Yuan's effort, but Sun stood aside. To Sun, the enemy number one of China at this time was *not* Japan, but rather Yuan Shikai himself.¹⁴³ So to support Yuan's effort, albeit for the sake of fighting imperialism, would in Sun's view ultimately be self-defeating, because it would only strengthen Yuan's power and prestige.¹⁴⁴ The problem for Sun was that this line of reasoning found little echo among his Guomindang colleagues and the public in general. In fact, Sun's position

¹⁴²See Edward Friedman's book, *Backward Toward Revolution*.

¹⁴³See his speech to the students at Beijing University in May 1915. Sun went so far to say that Yuan instigated the demands himself to please Japan: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:174-6.

¹⁴⁴*Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:176.

was widely regarded as unpatriotic, and Huang Xing was so upset with Sun that he rebuked Sun for his indifference.¹⁴⁵

Sun's political fortunes did not improve with Yuan's demise and the restoration of the 1913 parliament in the summer of 1916. Sun discovered once again that even politicians who were supposedly Guomindang members did not necessarily share his ideals. This is because while the Guomindang still existed in name, it had by this time effectively disintegrated into a number of smaller factions, each with its own political agenda. The radical wing of the Guomindang, represented by figures such as Hu Hanmin and Ma Junwu, still reverently supported Sun as its leader, but other factions had clearly become skeptical toward Sun's leadership.¹⁴⁶ Sun realized this himself, and this was why he wrote to his colleagues in the Chinese Revolutionary Party in late 1916 warning them that they should be careful when dealing with certain Guomindang members in the parliament. As Sun remarked, not only were they not supporters of the party's mission, but they might in fact work to disrupt the party's goals.¹⁴⁷ He also lamented on the fact that some key Guomindang members had become "bureaucratized", and according to Sun, they could not be relied upon anymore.¹⁴⁸

This tension between Sun and some Guomindang members was to be further exposed in late 1916 and early 1917. Sun had in late 1916 requested from the Beijing

¹⁴⁵Luo Jialun et.al. eds., *Huang Keqiang xiasheng quanji*, p.499. Friedman, *Backward*, pp.94-103; M. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yatsen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp.175-201.

¹⁴⁶For details, see chapter one. See also Shao, *Tuan*, pp.164ff.

¹⁴⁷See "The Newsletter of the General Office of the Chinese Revolutionary Party: 1917, no.1", *Zhongyang dangwu yuekan*, vol.4, 1928 no.4. pp.43-44. I want to thank the Hong Kong University Library for allowing me access to the materials.

¹⁴⁸See his letter on 22 December 1916, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:410.

government financial reimbursement for the expenses his Chinese Revolutionary Party incurred in the fight against Yuan Shikai's monarchical attempt in 1916. The sum Sun asked for was substantial, amounting to nearly 3 million yuan.¹⁴⁹ The Premier at this time, who was none other than Sun's arch-rival Duan Qirui, was on principle not opposed to the reimbursement.¹⁵⁰ Rather improbably it was the parliamentary members who turned out to be the strongest opponents of Sun's request. In meeting after meeting, parliamentary members scathingly criticized Sun's plea.¹⁵¹ Admittedly, most of the attacks were spearheaded by non-Guomindang members, but some Guomindang members also joined the attack,¹⁵² and this was why Sun lamented the fact that he was surrounded by criticisms.¹⁵³ Some members, for instance, chastised Sun for his apparent lack of concern for the poor financial health of the central government.¹⁵⁴ Others argued that since Sun's contribution to the anti-Yuan movement was minimal, it did not make sense if he was to receive the kind of compensation that he requested.¹⁵⁵ Some other members even openly questioned

¹⁴⁹See Sun's letter to the parliament on 23 December, 1916, *Canyiyuan*, Session 2 no.27, pp.90-93.

¹⁵⁰See *Canyiyuan*, Session 2 no.59, pp.1-2. It was apparently decided beforehand in the Cabinet that the government would try to reimburse the key revolutionaries of 1916 if they had proof of the major expenses they had incurred. Duan in fact promised to give Sun the money, although he failed to pay up for a long time: See Luo, "Youguan zhonghua gemingdang", 25:91.

¹⁵¹The number of petitions were astounding. See *Canyiyuan*, Session 2 no.24, p.54; *Zhongyiyuan*, Session 2 no.46, Appendix II:1-2; no.48, Appendix II:1-5; no.49, Appendix II:6-8; no.51 Appendix II:17-18 etc.

¹⁵²According to my own research on those who signed on the various petitions attacking Sun, quite a number were indeed Guomindang members. Some of them were to become members of the Canton parliament in 1917-1918, and thus paving the way for what would happen in May 1918.

¹⁵³*Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 4:284.

¹⁵⁴*Zhongyiyuan*, Session 2 no.51 Appendix II:18.

¹⁵⁵*Congyiyuan gongbao*, Session 2 no.42 Appendix II:6-8.

Sun's integrity, and raised the possibility that Sun's demand was purely for his own personal gain.¹⁵⁶

One can imagine how indignant and humiliated Sun must have felt.¹⁵⁷ A revolutionary hero with as impeccable a set of credentials as Sun had was now rather improbably questioned on matters regarding his integrity. It is also in this context we may understand how the *hufa* movement might have carried an additional dimension of meaning to Sun. To Sun, the *hufa* movement was not only the perfect chance to recreate the Republic and establish a new form of constitutional rule; it was also a golden opportunity for him to reestablish his credentials as the premier revolutionary leader of the country. With Cai E and Huang Xing both dead by this time, who else would have the prestige and moral authority to assume this leadership role?

Sun's Strengths

Granted that Sun was determined to sweep away the pseudo-republicans, but why did he think he had the ability to do so? After all, Duan Qirui was the predominant military leader at that time, and militarily Sun and his supporters were no match for him. One reason for Sun's confidence, it seems, was his strong belief that popular opinion would be on his side. In his various speeches in July and August 1917, he predicted that once his *hufa* movement got started, people would flock to its

¹⁵⁶See Sun's bitterness toward these accusations in his letter on 22 December 1916, Chen, *Nianpu changbian* 1:1014.

¹⁵⁷See Sun's reply to a letter in 1917 (exact date unknown), in which he complained how he had been attacked for his financial request from the government: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:284.

banner, and Duan would be swept aside despite his military strength.¹⁵⁸ On paper though, Sun had few reasons to be optimistic. His Chinese Revolutionary Party was in shambles, as it was already partially dissolved after the victory of the anti-Yuan campaign, owing to a lack of money.¹⁵⁹ Sun still kept in contact with some of his colleagues within the Party, but a number of regional bureaus had already been closed down.¹⁶⁰ In the summer of 1917, Sun apparently received financial support from the Germans because of his pro-German stance.¹⁶¹ But this sum was clearly not enough for the anticipated protracted struggle with Duan, who had access to the vast resources of the Beijing government and foreign loans.

Yet despite the idealism Sun exhibited in his rhetoric, Sun was in reality more practical than many historians have given him credit for. Sun had taken a number of steps to strengthen his position before he formally launched his movement, some with little success, but others with more. As explained, before Sun went down to Guangdong establish his rival government, he had already lobbied heavily for the support of the military overlords Lu Rongting and Tang Jiyao respectively.¹⁶² To be sure, neither of them showed much enthusiasm for Sun's cause. Lu, in particular, made no secret about the fact that he did not welcome Sun's plans of establishing a military government within his sphere of influence. This was why despite Sun's

¹⁵⁸See his speech before the reporters in Canton, 31 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:128.

¹⁵⁹See his letter in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:284.

¹⁶⁰See Sun's party circular on 10 December 1916, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 3:399-401.

¹⁶¹For details, see M. Wilbur, *Sun Yatsen: Frustrated Patriot*, pp.93-94. See also the eye-witness account of Ma Xiang, "Gensui Sun Zhongshan xiansheng shiyunian zhi huiyi: shang", *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* 1:148-149.

¹⁶²See the first-hand account by Pan Naide, "Sun Zhongshan xiansheng dui laoguixi junfa Lu Rongting de zhengqu he taofa", *Guangxi wensi ziliao* 7:200-226.

repeated plea that Lu should proceed to Canton to join the new government, Lu simply declined. Lu's protege, Chen Bingkun, the military governor of Guangdong, in fact openly said that it was unconstitutional to establish a government in Canton.¹⁶³ Tang Jiyao was on the surface more supportive of Sun, but in reality Tang's support went little beyond mere words. Unlike Lu, Tang might not have openly criticized Sun's activities, but he was also reluctant to publicly endorse Sun's movement.¹⁶⁴

Yet in all likelihood Sun had anticipated that even without the wholehearted support of the Southern warlords, he would still be able to mount a strong challenge against Duan. The support of the seven vessels of the Chinese navy was obviously one of Sun's greatest assets, and this explains why he was willing to give up the idea of becoming provisional president in exchange for Commander Cheng's support. The strategic importance of the navy at this time could not be over-emphasized. The fact that the navy had joined with Sun immediately made the neighboring Fujian vulnerable to an amphibious attack from Sun, and put Shanghai under threat from a possible coastal attack. Sun himself believed the reason why he failed in 1913 was that the navy was on the side of Beijing.¹⁶⁵ This was why the intelligence agents sent by Duan Qirui to the South saw the navy as the biggest threat posed by the South, and

¹⁶³Second Historical Archives, Nanjing. 679/32411-32412 *Canton Current Events and Rumours (CCER)*, 10 September 1917. These are the daily intelligence reports of the Canton Customs.

¹⁶⁴For Tang's ambiguous attitude, see Chen Changhe, "Hufa qijian Sun Zhongshan yu Tang Jiyao de maodun douzheng", *Jindaishi yanjiu*, no.20 (March 1984), pp.228-232; C. Moran, *Tang Jiyao and Sun Yatsen: Reform, Revolution and the Struggle for Southern China*, 1:153-160.

¹⁶⁵CCER 20 July 1917. Contemporaries generally believed that the navy was very important in determining the outcome of battles. See Friedman, *Backward*, p.194.

why Duan himself made repeated attempts to lure Commander Cheng back to his camp.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, Sun probably figured out that granted Lu's unwillingness to cooperate, but he should still be able to use Guangdong as a revolutionary base without Lu's help, thanks to his own Guangdong connections. The entourage which accompanied Sun to Guangdong included a number of figures who had been very important in the Guangdong political scene. Sun himself needs no introduction. Hu Hanmin, probably at this point Sun's closest associate, was Guangdong's first military governor after the 1911 Revolution. Hu still commanded considerable influence within the province at this point.¹⁶⁷ Then there was Chen Jiongming, who had by this time rejoined Sun's camp. Chen was the second military governor of Guangdong in 1912-1913 after Hu resigned, and he was vastly popular within the province because of his successful economic reforms during his tenure as governor. He broke with Sun in 1913 when he refused to support the Second Revolution, but he reconciled with Sun around early 1917.¹⁶⁸ This addition to Sun's camp meant that another local notable was now behind Sun's cause.¹⁶⁹ The fact that all of these figures were Guangdong natives is significant. Sun had good reasons to believe that should he clash with Lu in Guangdong, the local populace might actually rally behind him rather than Lu, because Lu and his associates were just "aliens" who came from Guangxi anyway.

¹⁶⁶See "Ma Fengchi mibao", *Jindaishi ziliao* (1978:1), p.2.

¹⁶⁷See Zhou Yu-e et.al., *Hu Hanmin pingzhuan*.

¹⁶⁸See Luo, "Ji Sun Zhongshan", 4:3. Li Shuixian, *Chen Jiongming panguoshi*, p.14.

¹⁶⁹For Chen, see W. Hsieh, "The Ideas and Ideals of a Warlord: Ch'en Chiung-ming (1878-1933)", *Papers On China*, 16 (1962).

Of course, the key weakness of Sun's camp was that he lacked a personal army, and this weakness had already been vividly demonstrated to Sun during the Second Revolution in 1913. Sun recognized this problem himself, and this was why before he went down to Guangdong he had already initiated talks with the civil governor of Guangdong, Zhu Qinglan.¹⁷⁰ Zhu had been on bitter terms with Lu because Lu and Chen Bingkun had tried to push him out of office. This was why Zhu was actually enthusiastic about Sun's plans to come down to Guangdong, because he saw Sun as a potential ally in his power struggle with Lu.¹⁷¹ Zhu, as civil governor, had under his command twenty-battalions of police squad which Lu had for long wanted to take over. Much to the disgust of Lu, Zhu now agreed to transfer those troops under Sun's command and retrain them as an amphibious force for Sun's expedition to the North. It was tentatively agreed that Chen Jiongming should be the commander of this force, a plan which materialized in early 1918.¹⁷² On top of this, Sun also had the support of Zhang Kairu, the commander of the Third Division of the Yunnan Army stationed in Guangdong.¹⁷³ In fact, Zhang was such a staunch supporter of Sun that he sometimes ignored orders from his Commander-in-chief, Tang Jiyao, when he felt that such orders would hurt Sun's interest.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰Sun sent Wu Zongci to talk with Zhu: see Wu Zongci, "Hufa jicheng", *Geming wenxian* 49:414.

¹⁷¹"Ma Fengchi", p.42.

¹⁷²See Li Jiezhi, "Zhu Qinglan yu jianli wuanmin yuejun de guanxi", *Sun Zhongshan sanci* ed. Weiyuanhui, pp.73-77. For comprehensive information on this army, see Shanweishi renwu yanjiushi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed. *Shanweishi renwu yanjiu shiliao: Chen Jiongming yu yuejun yanjiu shiliao* 6 vols.

¹⁷³"Ma Fengchi", pp.1-2; Sutton, *Provincial Militarism*, pp.238-243; Xie Benshu et.al. eds., *Xinan jinguoshi*, 1:258-259.

¹⁷⁴See Tang Jiyao's secret telegram on 29 March 1918 in *Zhongguo dier lishi danganguan* et.al. eds., *Hufa yundong*, p.725.

What ultimately bolstered Sun's confidence was his belief that if most of the parliamentary members were to come down in support of his cause, his government would assume such an aura of legitimacy that even the foreign powers would be forced to recognize its existence.¹⁷⁵ Sun knew the source of Duan's strength was the backing of the foreign powers, financial and otherwise. This was why as soon as Sun settled down in Canton, he began to lobby for foreign recognition.¹⁷⁶ Sun argued passionately that Duan's government had violated the spirit of republicanism, and he confidently predicted that most of the parliamentary members would soon come down to join his cause. There was hence, in Sun's view, every reason why the foreign powers should recognize his Guangdong government as the only legitimate government in China.¹⁷⁷

Sun's Problems: The Early Stage

But as it turned out, Sun's effort would encounter many more obstacles than perhaps he himself anticipated. To be sure, there were developments which did work in Sun's favor after he launched the movement. For instance, while neither Lu and Tang were originally keen to align themselves with Sun, Duan's subsequent attempt to centralize power was to make Sun a more attractive ally. During the power struggle between Duan and Li Yuanhong in the early summer of 1917, both Lu and Tang had supported the parliament and sided with Li.¹⁷⁸ Yet they were obviously not ready to

¹⁷⁵ Sun's speech on 31 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:127.

¹⁷⁶ Wilbur, *Frustrated Patriot*, pp.94-95.

¹⁷⁷ See Sun's public letter to the powers, *Geming wenxian* 49:152-155.

¹⁷⁸ Li, *Political History* (Stanford, 1956), p.377.

break completely with Duan either. As I will explain in chapter three, both Lu and Tang knew that they stood to lose a great deal if they severed their relations with Beijing. They knew that Sun's plans would compel them to break permanently with Duan, and this was why they were at best lukewarm to Sun's effort.

It was Duan's actions which would force their hands. In an attempt to expand his influence to the Southern provinces, Duan appointed several of his proteges to the military governorships of provinces where his control was previously limited, such as Hunan. This caused considerable concern to Lu and Tang, because they believed that if they did not take a stance against these appointments, Duan's next target of expansion would be their own provinces. This was why in the fall of 1917, Lu and Tang were frantically searching for ways to reach a compromise with Beijing.¹⁷⁹ Their effort failed, however, because in October, Duan started to send his troops to Hunan in preparation for a military showdown with Lu and Tang. All this ironically benefitted no one like it did Sun and his associates, because it forced Lu and Tang to join in the fight against Duan.¹⁸⁰ Now that Duan was their common enemy, the Southern warlords realized that they had to cooperate with Sun or face extinction in the hands of Duan.

Granted the fact that the Southern warlords and Sun were now allies, but their attitude toward Sun remained at best indifferent. Tang was on the surface respectful to Sun, because after all, Sun's area of operations was far from his Yunnan proper. Lu, in

¹⁷⁹Tang, for instance, sent a confidential telegram to Liang Qichao on 19 August saying that it was the circumstances which forced him to rebel against the Beijing government, and that he had not been under the influence of Sun Yatsen. See *Yunnan dangan shiliao* no.3 (1983), p.30.

¹⁸⁰E. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*, pp.253-259.

comparison, was far more hostile toward Sun's various activities in Guangdong. He explicitly instructed Governor Chen to distance himself from Sun's Military government. He refused to offer any financial help to Sun despite Sun's repeated requests. The fact that Governor Chen went so far as to demand Sun to pay for any telegrams he sent *via* the provincial office is telling of how bad relations were between Sun and Lu.¹⁸¹ In fact, Chen openly said that there was simply no need to establish a separate government as Sun did.¹⁸²

This was but one problem Sun's movement had to face, and there were more to come. For instance, Sun never received the kind of enthusiastic welcome from the Guangdong populace he had hoped for. As he was to complain later, he felt the Guangdong public had in general been very "cold" to him.¹⁸³ Indeed, it is quite true to say that the Guangdong population simply did not take Sun's movement seriously at all. This is a point worth our emphasis, because under the influence of subsequent party historians we have often assumed that Sun was the undisputed leader of the movement, when in fact his leadership was constantly challenged. But when one surveys the newspapers of Guangdong at that time, one will realize that they paid only scant attention to Sun's rhetoric and activities, even though they might be pro-hufa in their stance. Instead, they paid far more attention to the movements of Lu Rongting and Governor Chen, obviously because they believed the attitude of Lu and Chen was

¹⁸¹Shao Yunchong, "Zongli hufa shilu", *Geming wenxian* 7:5-27. Shao was a member of the Military government, so what he offers is a first-hand account of how Sun saw the events.

¹⁸²CCER 25 July 1917.

¹⁸³Sun Zhongshan quanji 4:290-292.

critical in determining whether the *hufa* movement would be a success.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, in the eyes of the moulders of public opinion in Guangdong, Sun was only *one* of the leaders of this movement to protect the constitution, and *by no means* was he the predominant one. If Sun saw himself as the premier leader of a struggle for true republicanism, sadly the people around him took Lu and Chen much more seriously.¹⁸⁵ This was also why the majority of the departmental heads in the Military government did not take up their appointments immediately after they were selected. Many of the appointees wanted to wait until Lu and Tang gave their blessings to Sun's movement, and they would not commit themselves until Lu and Tang did so first.¹⁸⁶

What must have further frustrated Sun was the fact that his various ideas for the new government were repeatedly vetoed by his allies and sometimes his close supporters. Take for instance the matter concerning the structure of the new Military government. Sun would have liked to simply elect himself as the Commander-in-Chief assuming overall control of the new Military government, but his associates opposed, fearing that this might further alienate Lu and Tang from the movement.¹⁸⁷ So in an effort to show respect for Lu and Tang, Sun grudgingly elected them as Marshals of the Military government to assist him in running the government,

¹⁸⁴I reach this conclusion by reading the contemporary newspapers of Guangdong which have survived: *Guangdong qishierhang shangbao*, *Guangdong zhonghua xinbao*, *Yuebao*, and *Kuaibao*. I want to thank the various libraries and institutions in Guangzhou for allowing me access to the materials.

¹⁸⁵See *Changsha dagongbao* 17 October 1917, p.3.

¹⁸⁶This was apparent in the case of Li Liejun, whom Sun wanted to appoint as Chief of the General Staff. Li originally agreed, but then he changed his mind, fearing that Tang Jiyao might oppose. See Shao Yunchong, "Guangzhou hufa riji", *Jianguo yuekan*, (vol.12, no.6), pp.6-7.

¹⁸⁷This is according to the account of Wu Jinglian: Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.123.

although he himself, as the Grand Marshal, would still be the highest authority within the Military government.

But this was just the beginning of Sun's problems. As Sun found out, even though he was in name the leader of the *hufa* movement, he could not make policies and decisions just as he pleased. For instance, even though Sun was not enthusiastic about inviting former President Li Yuanhong to join him in Guangdong, circumstances soon dictated that he changed his stance.¹⁸⁸ The reason for Sun's opposition against Li is not hard to fathom. Sun had never forgiven Li for dissolving the old parliament in June 1917, and of course it was Li's invitation of Zhang Xun to the capital which presented Zhang with the opportunity to restore the Manchus. In fact, Sun was so disgusted with Li that in late May 1917 Sun remarked that Li was no different from other "restorationists".¹⁸⁹ Naturally Sun must also have realized that if Li was to come to Canton, his own premier position within the Canton government would be threatened. But once again, despite Sun's opposition, both Commander Cheng and the Southern warlords strongly supported Li,¹⁹⁰ and in early September Sun had to grudgingly invite Li to join his cause.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Publicly Sun said nothing about what Li's position should be in the new government, but his silence on this issue already indicated that he did not expect him to be the President. In fact, according to Zhang Binglin, Sun did tell him that he did not want Li to come to Canton as president. Tang, *Zhang Taiyan*, 1:549.

¹⁸⁹*Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:100.

¹⁹⁰For instance, Lu sent a telegram to Sun saying in early September that the urgent task now was to restore Li to the presidency. *Geming wenxian* 49:380.

¹⁹¹See his telegram to Li Yuanhong on 3 September 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:137. Even then Sun mentioned nothing about restoring Li to the presidency.

This was not all. Sun was to find out that he would have other major differences with those around him regarding how the Military government should be run. For instance, even after Li Yuanhong made it clear that he would not return to politics, Sun's allies still refused to entertain the idea of electing him as the new provisional president. Instead, Commander Cheng and the Southern warlords turned to support Feng Guozhang, who had by this time succeeded Li as the new president in Beijing.¹⁹² Why? First and foremost, this was because there was a general consensus that Feng was indeed the legal successor to Li, since Feng was properly elected as the vice-president before Li's resignation in July. There was, therefore, not much ground even for *hufa* supporters to dispute Feng's presidency.¹⁹³ Furthermore, some of the *hufa* activists knew that their support for Feng could serve as a way of playing Feng against Duan. An endorsement for Feng might arouse the suspicions of Duan against Feng, and might help to undermine the unity of the Northern militarists.¹⁹⁴

Sun saw things differently though. To Sun, an endorsement for a Northern warlord such as Feng could not but be taken as a great compromise of his *hufa* ideals. It is true that Feng was not part of Duan's attack on the parliament during the debate on war participation in April and May of 1917. Neither was Feng responsible for calling a provisional senate instead of reconvening the old parliament in late July 1917. Yet to Sun, the fact that Feng failed to show any signs of disapproval for Duan's actions

¹⁹²See, for instance, Tang's telegram saying that Feng was the legal president on 17 August 1917 in *Yunnan dangan shiliao*, no.3 (1983), p.29. For Lu's attitude, see "Ma Fengchi", p.64.

¹⁹³This was why even Wu Jinglian addressed Feng as the Acting President in a telegram in August 1917. See *Danganguan, Hufa*, p.394.

¹⁹⁴Han Yucheng, "Zhengxuehui de zhengzhi huodong", *Wenshi ziliao* 48:195.

was in itself solid proof that he was not on the side of the cause of *hufa*.¹⁹⁵ In Sun's black-and-white conception of the battle between true republicans and pseudo-republicans, Feng surely did not belong to the former camp.

The Parliamentary Betrayal

What distressed Sun the most in the end was the fact that the majority of parliamentary members failed to show support for his cause either. By mid-August, there were only about 130 members of the 1916-1917 parliament in Canton, out of a possible eight hundred plus members.¹⁹⁶ This failure to attract members to Canton carried with it serious consequences, and it was to haunt the *hufa* movement till the very end. Because there were so few parliamentary members in Canton, Sun was forced by constitutional procedures to convene an emergent session of parliament, not the full session he had wanted. This was also one of the factors which compelled Sun to form a military government instead of a full rival government in Canton.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, this lack of enthusiasm for Sun's cause among the parliamentary members would not only undermine the legitimacy of Sun's movement, but would also make it impossible

¹⁹⁵This position was articulated by Sun's close associate at this time, Zhang Binglin. *Dangnaguan, Hufa*, pp.396-397.

¹⁹⁶Shen Taixian, "Feichang guohui", 82:204.

¹⁹⁷Sun knew that it was not constitutional to convene a full session of the parliament unless he had 50% of the members present. He therefore decided to convene an emergent session, pointing out that it had been done in France before: Shen, "Feichang guohui", 82:204.

for Sun to present any serious argument to the foreign powers that it was his government, not Duan's, which should gain their recognition.¹⁹⁸

It is rather ironic that it was the parliamentary members, those who presumably should have the most to gain from Sun's cause, who turned out to be the least enthusiastic about Sun's activities. Was it not true that a major reason why Sun launched the *hufa* movement in the first place was that he wanted the reconvention of the old parliament of 1916-1917, which had been dissolved since June 1917, and which Duan refused to recall? If this was the case, why were members of the dissolved parliament not willing to support a cause which would bring about the restoration of their institution?

One major reason is that the dissolution of the old parliament did not necessarily hurt the interests of *all* the members concerned. For instance, those parties which did not do well in the election of 1912 were now presented with a chance to increase their numbers within the parliament. The Research Clique (formerly the Progressives) led by Liang Qichao was a case in point. In the 1912 election, the Progressives came a distant second to the Guomindang led by Song Jiaoren. The rivalry between the Guomindang and the Progressives had been vicious ever since, but the Guomindang always managed to take the upper-hand because of its large majority in parliament. After Duan reclaimed the premiership in July 1917, Liang and his associates saw that the chance to reinvigorate the fortunes of their party had come.

¹⁹⁸In any case, the foreign powers were skeptical toward Sun's activities. When Sun tried to visit the various foreign consuls in Canton in mid-August 1917, he drew a very cold response, as only the Japanese consul was willing to see him: CCER 20 August 1917.

They threw their support to Duan's camp, and in return they captured five out of the nine cabinet positions in Duan's new government announced in late July 1917.¹⁹⁹

This was why the parliamentary members of the Research Clique had every reason to stay in Beijing and support Duan's decision not to reconvene the old parliament, because it was a parliament in which they were a minority anyway. With their associates now firmly in control of the executive branch of government, and with many Guomindang members gone South to support Sun's *hufa* movement, they had good reasons to feel that they would fare well in any new election. Because of this, not only were they not opposed to Duan's plans to revise electoral laws and the composition of the Senate, but they were in fact the prime-movers behind those revisions in late 1917. Since Duan's revisions were intended to weaken the Guomindang, the Research Clique members knew very well they would in fact be the main beneficiaries of such changes. It therefore came as no surprise that few Research Clique members would go South to "protect the constitution". To them, the developments in July 1917 were an opportunity, not a crisis.²⁰⁰

To be sure, the rest of the parliamentary members were by and large not ready to support Duan as the Research Clique did, because they regarded Duan's refusal to reconvene their parliament as unconstitutional. Yet their opposition to Duan did not necessarily translate into support for Sun's *hufa* effort. On the contrary, most actually chose to remain neutral and stayed in either Shanghai or Beijing. Why? Part of the

¹⁹⁹Jiyu, *Duan Qirui zhuan*, p.304.

²⁰⁰Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, pp.93-96. The Senate was a stronghold for the Guomindang. By reducing the size of the Senate and removing the privilege of electing senators from the Guomindang controlled provincial assemblies, the "reforms" helped the Research Clique and hurt the Guomindang: see Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.92-93.

reason was financial. Duan, for instance, gave a great deal of financial incentives to members who stayed away from Canton. One has to remember that being a parliamentary member was not only an honor in the early Chinese Republic, but financially a very rewarding occupation. Each member received 5000 yuan from the government annually, which was a substantial salary by any standard, not to mention the various reimbursement they received and the subsidies they got from their respective political parties.²⁰¹ Therefore, what happened in the summer of 1917 was a great blow to their jobs and comfortable livelihood. Already their stipends were stopped during Duan's struggle with President Li and Zhang Xun's subsequent attempt to restore the Manchus. Now Duan's decision not to recall them meant that they had effectively lost their jobs. What should they do?

What made the decision so much more difficult for these members was the fact that the majority of them did not come from economically the most prosperous classes of society, and they did need the income to support themselves. A third of them (34%) were what one may call "professional assemblymen", serving in provincial and national assemblies from the late Qing onward before they served in the republican parliament. These members were at a loss as to what they should do now. Others (30%) were government officials before they got elected, but this was no longer a door opened to them unless they were willing to work under Duan. Yet others (21%) were teachers in the provinces before their election, an occupation which hardly provided a

²⁰¹Qian, *Jidu*, 1:25. There is yet to be a study on the living standard and wages in the 1910s, but some comparisons with other occupations will highlight how financially rewarding it was to serve in the parliament. For instance, an assistant chef serving the Senate earned only 7 yuan a month, while a first-class police officer earned 14 yuan: see SHA 1060/64.

comfortable living.²⁰² In the aftermath of Yuan's dissolution of parliament in 1913, many members were indeed forced to assume high-school teaching positions out of a lack of options.²⁰³ Now to the horror of the parliamentary members, it was *deja vu* all over again. Their jobs were taken away once again, and there was a great deal of uncertainty among them at this time.²⁰⁴

Duan cleverly exploited this uncertainty to his advantage. He established study societies in Beijing and paid any parliamentary member who joined a handsome stipend each month. These societies sponsored few academic activities, and in reality their purpose was simply to keep the parliamentary members away from Canton. In addition to this, Duan also promised to pay back the stipends which were not given during the chaotic months of May to July, if the members agreed to stay in Beijing.²⁰⁵ What Duan hoped to accomplish from all this was not necessarily to buy the good-will of the parliamentary members, which he knew was difficult. What he wanted was simply the neutrality of the members, because he knew the fact that most members stayed away from Canton would already be enough to discredit the Canton government. He also wanted to make sure that the members stayed away from Canton out of their own volition. This was why he did not use force to stop those who did go to Canton, something he could easily have done if he had wanted to.

²⁰²Based on Zhang Pengyuan, "Political Participation and Political Elites in Early Republican China: The Parliament of 1913-1914". *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.37 no.2 (Feb. 1978), pp.293-313.

²⁰³This is my conclusion from my survey of the parliamentary members recorded in Xu, *Cidian*.

²⁰⁴See Shen, "Feichang guohui".

²⁰⁵Shen, "Feichang guohui", pp.203-204.

When compared with Duan, what Sun had to offer to the parliamentary members was minimal. Sun, unlike Duan, was not able promise a stipend to any member who would like to join his cause. Even though Sun created consulting positions within the Military government to support those members he favored, until early 1918 the majority of the parliamentary members in Canton were living on a small and uncertain stipend.²⁰⁶ After Sun took over the Salt Inspectorate in February 1918, he was able to allocate part of the salt revenue for the members. But even then the situation was far from desirable, as the monthly wage never topped 200 yuan a month.²⁰⁷ This was why according to some first-hand accounts, some members who were originally keen to join Sun's cause changed their mind and ended up staying in Beijing or Shanghai.²⁰⁸

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that joining Sun's cause actually took a lot of courage, not only because it made no sense financially, but also because it could be an extremely dangerous adventure. Duan's government was much more powerful financially and militarily than the South, and few contemporaries seriously believed the South could defeat the North in the long run.²⁰⁹ Duan in fact confidently told the Speaker of the Senate, Wang Jiaxiang, that he could "destroy Canton in three months",

²⁰⁶ *Chenzhongbao* 5 October 1917, p.2.

²⁰⁷ Zhang, Wu Jinglian, p.134.

²⁰⁸ Shen, "Feichang guohui", pp.203-204. The pro-Sun newspaper, *Minguo ribao*, believed that this was also the reason why those who did go down to Canton would in the end "betray" Sun. 21 May 1918, p.3.

²⁰⁹ Some members themselves thought that there was no chance that a Northern expedition would succeed: Han, "Zhengxuehui", pp.195-196.

and said that it made no sense for Wang to go down there.²¹⁰ This pervasive pessimism also explains why whenever the South faced internal troubles or acute external threats, there would be a mass exodus of parliamentary members out of Canton.²¹¹ The *hufa* struggle was, indeed, literally a matter of life and death for the members.

All this may help to explain why so many parliamentary members would stay away from Sun's cause, but it did not explain why Sun would have problems working with those who *did* choose to come down to join him despite all odds. Sun's relationship with the parliamentary members in Canton had been stormy right from the inception of the Military government. In May 1918, the Canton parliament even passed a bill which reorganized the Military government. Instead of being the Grand Marshal, Sun was demoted to be merely one of the seven directors of the reorganized government. Why did this happen? If Sun had all along wanted to protect the parliament, why did the Canton parliament not protect him?

In the eyes of Sun, and indeed those of later Guomindang party historians, the reorganization took place because the parliamentary members in Canton were self-interested politicians who were only marginally concerned with the cause of *hufa*.²¹² But as I will show in chapter four, if the parliamentary members were not supportive

²¹⁰Han, "Zhengxuehui", p.194. The pro-Sun newspaper, *Minguo ribao*, ran a series of editorials in late August arguing that the South was actually stronger militarily than the North, but they obviously convinced no one.

²¹¹For instance, many members left when negotiations broke down between Canton and Beijing in late October 1917, and when Duan started to invade Hunan: CCER 25 October 1917.

²¹²See Sun's public telegram after the reorganization of the Military government, in which Sun bitterly condemned what happened. Tang Jiyao was so upset with Sun's telegram that he wrote on the side that Sun had "no shame". See Danganguan, *Hufa*, pp.508-509.

of his *hufa* ideals, the public was in general hardly more enthusiastic about his cause either. Indeed, Sun himself admitted that even in Guangdong he found little backing for his activities from the general population.²¹³ This was also where Sun's greatest source of frustration lay. He might be able to criticize certain parliamentary members as unprincipled politicians, but he knew he could not possibly condemn the wishes of the whole population.

In this respect, perhaps Sun's frustrations were not unlike those of the French republicans in the late 1840s described by Karl Marx's in *The Class Struggles of France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*. In these two classics, Marx describes the political situation in France in the aftermath of the revolution of 1848, in which the bourgeois republicans, having overturned the monarchy, brought themselves to the forefront of power. However, the irony was that their ideology compelled them to push for democratization and share power with other classes, something which "at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society".²¹⁴ As it turned out, the republicans found themselves to be the victims of their own ideology. Instead of being winners in the new democratic system, the republicans found themselves beaten by the conservatives and a Bonaparte in national elections.²¹⁵

Of course, the 1911 Revolution was very different in nature from the 1848 Revolution in France. But one thing comparable is the similar dilemma faced by the

²¹³31 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:127.

²¹⁴D. McLellan ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p.292.

²¹⁵A. Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 2:146-158.

1911 revolutionaries and the bourgeois republicans of 1848. The victory in 1911 translated into a republican form of government for China, but this form of government did not necessarily insure that the ideals of the victors of 1911 would be served. Like the 1848 revolutionaries, Sun and his allies were soon to discover that the politicians who were to emerge and the general electorate who voted for the latter did not necessarily support the ideals they espoused. What happened in the *hufa* movement epitomized Sun's problem. Sun might have seen himself as the savior of the Republic by launching the *hufa* movement, but the majority of the parliamentary members failed to come down to Canton to join him to save the Republic, and those who did in the end pushed him out of power. Sun might have expected popular support for his crusade for true constitutional rule, but he met a public which was at best lukewarm to his plans, and which was instead content with a Beijing government of suspect legality. Viewed in this light, Sun's bitterness in May 1918 could be easily understood. In his eyes indeed, the republican system had betrayed the revolutionaries who created it in the first place.

The Parliamentary Viewpoint

If to Sun the parliamentary members had betrayed him, to the members it was Sun who forced them to take the drastic actions they took in May 1918. There were, at this time, three main political groups within the Canton parliament. Firstly, there were the radical Guomindang members, including figures such as Zou Lu and Ma Junwu, who were loyal followers of Sun. At the other end of the spectrum, there was the so-called Political Study Society (*Zhengxuehui*), led by figures such as Han Yucheng. They were much less optimistic about the eventual success of the movement, and

hence they were ready to talk with Beijing for peace if the terms were right. They also felt that they should exploit the rivalry between Feng Guozhang and Duan Qirui and solicit the support of Feng.²¹⁶

But the group which held the balance were the moderate Guomindang parliamentarians grouped loosely together under the name of *Yiyoushe*, led by the Speaker of the Canton parliament, Wu Jinglian.²¹⁷ They were numerically also the largest group within the parliament. Indeed, the reason why the reorganization bill commanded enough votes in May was that Wu and his associates joined forces with the Political Study Society and threw their support behind the move.²¹⁸ Why? Contrary to what Sun claimed, Wu and his associates were actually very keen supporters of the *hufa* movement. Like Sun, Wu was bitterly opposed to any negotiations with the Beijing government, and like Sun as well, he insisted that Beijing must restore the old parliament before any talks with the North should start.²¹⁹ In fact, before Wu went down to Canton, Feng Guozhang had offered Wu as much as 3000 yuan just to stay in Shanghai. The fact that Wu still took the risks to join Sun despite

²¹⁶See Han's memoirs on his party's stance: Han, "Zhengxuehui", pp.195-196.

²¹⁷For the origins of *Yiyoushe*, see Li Genyuan, 'Wuo yu zhengxuexi', *Wenshi ziliao* 3:84-86.

²¹⁸The bill for the reorganization of the military government was eventually passed on 4 May, 1918. There are discrepancies in available accounts concerning how many people voted for and against the bill. Shao Yunchong says that there were about forty plus members supporting the bill among the eighty plus members present. Shao, "Zongli", p.24. However, according to one of the members, there were nearly 100 votes supporting the motion: Shen, "Feichang guohui", p.206. The contemporary journalist Tao Juyin said there were 97 votes for the motion, 27 against: Tao Juyin, *Beiyang junfa tongzhi shiqi shihua*, 2:766. The official publication *Junzhengfu gongbao*, unfortunately, tells us nothing about the vote.

²¹⁹See for instance, Wu's interview around mid-1918 in "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", *Jindaishi ziliao* no.42 (1980), pp.47-49 (document 40).

this cannot but show his commitment to the cause of *hufa*.²²⁰ But if Wu did wholeheartedly espouse the ideals of the *hufa*, why then would he stab Sun in the back in May 1918?

To understand this, we must appreciate how some of Sun's actions had offended Wu and the moderate wing of the Guomindang right from the inception of the movement. For instance, Wu was obviously very upset with the fact that Sun would dare to suggest himself as the provisional president in the new government when they were conducting preliminary discussions in July 1917. To Wu, this was simply unconstitutional, and he said that he would not support anything "outside of the constitution, even if he was threatened by force".²²¹ Sun in the end backed down, but this had already left a scar to his relationship with Wu. When Wu arrived in Canton in early August, Sun was the conspicuous absentee in the welcoming party for Wu.²²² The situation worsened when Sun tried again to declare himself provisional president in late August. Wu and other members flatly turned down Sun's proposal, and Sun responded by verbally abusing Wu. Wu was so upset that he vowed not to see Sun again.²²³

What further alienated Wu and the moderate parliamentarians from Sun was the fact that even though Sun had now given them a home in Canton with the convention of an emergent session of parliament, they soon realized that they actually

²²⁰Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.116.

²²¹Quoted in Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.115.

²²²Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, pp.119-121.

²²³This was Zhang Binglin's eye-witness account: see Tang, *Zhang Taiyan* 1:548. See also CCER 28 August 1917, 1 September 1917.

had little control over the decision-making process within the Canton government. Wu had originally proposed that executive decisions be made by a committee composed of key members of the parliament and other notables, but Sun vetoed this plan.²²⁴ In the end, Sun pushed through an arrangement in which the locus of power would be placed on the Military government over which he had total control. This is apparent when one examines *The Outline to the Structure of the Military Government*, passed in late August 1917.

Under this *Outline*, the Military government and Sun the Grand Marshal were given wide-ranging powers. For instance, article three of the document endowed Sun with "all the executive powers of the Republic until the Provisional Constitution was restored". It is true that the heads of the various departments within the Military Government were to be selected by the parliament together with the Grand Marshal. Yet if a certain position became vacant, the Grand Marshal had the authority to simply appoint an acting department head before the parliament elected a replacement, something which Sun would do rather often in the following months. There were no clauses in the document which stipulated how the parliament could check and balance the authority of the Grand Marshal and the Military government, and Sun was effectively his own master when it came to day-to-day administration.²²⁵

This was why some members of parliament complained that they often had little to do.²²⁶ To make things worse, Sun himself made little effort to inform them of

²²⁴Tang, *Zhang Taiyan*, 1:548.

²²⁵See the document in Danganguan, *Hufa*, p.413.

²²⁶Chen Jiushao, "Zhongiyuan shiernian qinlijii", *Hunan wenshi ziliao*, 8:232-233.

the decisions he made. For instance, parliamentary members knew nothing about Sun's plans to contract foreign loans, and Sun never sought parliamentary approval for his decision to take over the Salt Inspectorate from the diplomatic corps in February 1918.²²⁷ The fact that Sun did not take the discussions in the Canton parliament seriously must be one of the reasons why attendance was often so low.²²⁸ Many members simply felt that they had little to contribute by being in Canton.²²⁹ The members must have thought: if Sun was truly for the Provisional Constitution, how could he ignore the parliament like this?

Sun might have said that he and the Military government had always treated the parliament as "their father".²³⁰ Sun might also have been on the side of the parliament in 1916-1917 when it fought for power with the executive headed by Duan Qirui.²³¹ Yet the *Outline* he helped to draft did not at all give the parliament the powers he said it should possess only months ago. Instead, he relegated the role of the parliament to being a mere rubber-stamp of the policies of his Military government. What is more was that Sun made little effort to cultivate good relations with the members. In fact, a close associate of Sun was so concerned even after May 1918 that

²²⁷This is obvious when one reads the debates in the Canton parliament, published in the pro-Sun newspaper *Minguo ribao*.

²²⁸For instance, in a meeting in late September, there were as few as sixty members in the parliament by the time of voting: see *Chenzhong bao* 9 October 1917, p.2. When some members first discussed the motion for a reorganization of the Military government in early April 1918, there were again only sixty plus members: see Shao, Zongli", p.23.

²²⁹See for instance, Chen, "Zhongyiyuan", p.232. This contrasts starkly with the situation in 1916-1917 when parliamentary members were fully participating in the decision-making process. See chapter one.

²³⁰See his speech to the parliamentary members in Canton on 11 April 1918: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:442.

²³¹See chapter one.

he asked Sun to work harder on improving his relationship with the members, or he would have to face the consequences.²³²

To Sun, however, this style of government was not inconsistent with what he had all along espoused, because he had always believed that desperate times called for desperate measures. As he had detailed in his *Three People's Principles*, before the establishment of a true Republic, it was necessary to have a period of political tutelage in which the executive would take charge and complete the revolution on the behalf of the people.²³³ But the parliamentary members saw things rather differently. Sun's behavior was to them a clear indication that he had no respect for their presence at all. This resentment reached a climax when in late September and October 1917 some members went public with their discontent. They bitterly complained that some of the officials appointed by Sun were arrogant and disrespectful to them. Reminiscent of how officials used to memorialize to the throne about court abuses in imperial China, these parliamentary members lamented the fact that only a few people around Sun could now participate in the decision-making process within the government. As they said, it seemed that nowadays even respected figures like Hu Hanmin and Wang Jingwei were not part of that process, not to mention the ordinary parliamentary member.²³⁴ Furthermore, the members were disturbed by Sun's attempt to mortgage

²³²See Tian Tong to Sun Yatsen, 4 September 1918, Zhongguo Guomindang Dangshihui, Taipei 241/1013.

²³³*Guofu quanji* 1:233-235.

²³⁴It was reported that Sun would simply ignore the advice of close associates like Hu Hanmin: see *Changsha dagongbao* 17 October 1917, p.3. Sun was also more and more drawn to the radical elements of the Guomindang, especially Zhu Zhixin. Zhu was one of the chief architects behind the bombing of Mo's provincial office in January 1918, which I will describe later. It was also Zhu who masterminded the assassination of Commander Cheng Biguang in Feb. 1918, because Sun felt that Cheng was obstructing his *hufa* goals. See the first-hand account of Luo, "Youguan zhonghua gemingdang", pp.97-104.

provincial assets for foreign loans without their prior approval. They felt that such loans would hurt the interests of the country, and would make their government no better than Duan's regime in Beijing.²³⁵ They could not understand why Sun was willing to make such concessions.

Sun was able to calm down the members' discontent, but only for the time being. What further worsened Sun's relationship with the parliamentary members was the way he worked to further the cause of his *hufa* movement. As I will explain in chapter three, Sun's strategy was aggressive, if not outright ruthless. Sun would not hesitate to seize whatever resources he had access to, by whatever means which might be available to him. Because of this Sun was ready to contract foreign loans even if they meant a major sacrifice of national interests. Because of this Sun was also ready to encroach upon the prerogatives of the provincial regime established by Lu Rongting, even though at least in name Lu was his *hufa* ally. As Lu was to realize, Sun would not feel embarrassed about competing with him for the resources within Guangdong.²³⁶

Sun's readiness to sacrifice the internal solidarity of the *hufa* movement for the expansion of his Military government deeply troubled Wu. Sun's aggressive tactics reached a climax when he bombed the office of Military Governor Mo Rongxin, Lu's protege, in January 1918. Sun had been frustrated with Mo's attitude toward his Military government for a while. Not only was Mo indifferent to the cause of *hufa*, but he in fact tried to block Sun's plan of recruiting an army from civilians, and went

²³⁵ *Chenzhong bao* 5 October 1917, p.2; 9 October 1917, p.2. *Changsha dagongbao*, 6 October 1917, p.3; 8 October 1917, p.6.

²³⁶ See chapter three.

so far as to kill several of Sun's agents.²³⁷ Sun was furious, and despite the advice of his associates to the contrary, Sun decided to launch an attack at Mo's provincial office in early January 1918.²³⁸

It is not clear what Sun wanted to accomplish with this attack. It is difficult to tell whether he meant the attack as a *coup d'etat* to topple Mo's government,²³⁹ or whether he simply wanted to teach Mo a lesson as he later claimed.²⁴⁰ But it certainly caused an outrage not only among the Guangdong populace,²⁴¹ but also among many parliamentary members. Wu himself actually got wind of the attack before it took place, and had painstakingly detailed to Sun the reasons why Sun must not carry out such actions.²⁴² But Sun ignored him, and this was why Wu was furious when he heard of the attack. As Wu angrily exclaimed, "The Big Liar Mr. Sun (*Sun Dapao*) is indeed as good as his name, and he is going to cost us our lives!"²⁴³

This exclamation is very telling, because it shows us Wu's belief that if Lu was to become an enemy, not a friend, then their cause would have no future at all. This was why all along Wu had considered Lu to be a key ally in the fight against Duan

²³⁷Lu Danlin, "Zongli paojiao Mo Rongxin", *Geming wenxian* 49:135-136.

²³⁸Liu, "Yuanshuaifu", 49:132-133.

²³⁹This seemed to be the original intent, and this was indeed what Sun's declaration said immediately after the bombing. *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:289.

²⁴⁰This was what Sun said to the Guangdong elites on 9 Jan. 1918: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:290-291.

²⁴¹According to *Shenbao*'s report on 9 January 1918, the general response to Sun's actions was one of universal condemnation: Quoted in Shanweishi, *Chen Jiongming* 1:90.

²⁴²Liu, "Yuanshuaifu", pp.132-133.

²⁴³Chen, "Zhongyiyuan", pp.231-232.

Qirui. Even before Wu came down to Canton, he was already very concerned whether Sun would enjoy the support of Lu in Canton.²⁴⁴ Wu believed that Lu was vital to the cause of *hufa*, and if Lu was to become an opponent, then all would be lost. This explains why Wu was so upset with what he saw as Sun's reckless behavior. It was from this point on that Wu became publicly disaffected with Sun.²⁴⁵

May 1918

It is in this context that we can understand why Wu would support the reorganization of the Military government which took place in May 1918. From the beginning Wu was not happy with the Military government as it stood. He believed "because the Military government never got the approval of the Southwestern leaders before its establishment, its effectiveness had been severely limited." This was why as early as in October 1917, Wu proposed that the Military government be reorganized, in an attempt to bring together all the anti-Duan forces.²⁴⁶ At this time Sun was on principle not opposed to the idea.²⁴⁷ It was in fact Lu Rongting who was opposed to the plan, because he feared that the reorganization would merely serve to increase

²⁴⁴Wu asked one of Sun's associates Pan Naide whether Sun had the support of Lu, and Pan lied by giving an affirmative answer. See Pan Naide, "Feichang guohui mantan", *Sun Zhongshan sanci* ed. Weiyuanhui, p.83.

²⁴⁵Chen, "Zhongyiyuan", pp.231-232.

²⁴⁶Wu's telegram on 21 October 1917, Danganguan, *Hufa*. pp.432-433. There were different plans for a reorganization going around at this time. See Xu Huiqi, "Li Liejun yu 'hufa gesheng lianhe huiyi'", *Jindaishi ziliao* (1994:6), pp.98-100.

²⁴⁷21 November 1917, Danganguan, *Hufa*. p.444.

Sun's power at his expense.²⁴⁸ This was why for a while discussions on this matter failed to make much headway.

But interest for the plan was rekindled when the Southern armies suffered major defeats in the hands of General Wu Peifu in April 1918. The call for unity in face of the acute situation became louder than ever before, and in early May a bill for the reorganization was presented to the Canton parliament. It was now Sun who was bitterly opposed to the plan, because he realized that it was his power, not Lu's, which would be undermined.²⁴⁹ Wu gave his full backing to the plan, and in fact masterminded the vote in parliament which made the reorganization possible.²⁵⁰ Wu and his associates did this not only because they had been frustrated with Sun's leadership for long, but also because they saw the urgency to form a more united front against Duan's government. He believed there was a desperate need to draw Lu Rongting, Tang Jiyao, and other forces within Guangdong into the *hufa* effort, and he knew this would not happen unless and until Sun was removed as the leader of the movement and Sun's Military government restructured.²⁵¹

This was why the reorganization was not simply about removing Sun from the Grand Marshalcy, but also about establishing a system of government in which all

²⁴⁸USDS 893.00/2773 Heintzleman to Reinsch, 21 January 1918.

²⁴⁹See Sun's telegram to Chen Jiongming, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:456-457.

²⁵⁰Some of the Guomindang members were angry with the fact that Wu called the police to make sure that those opposed to the reorganization could not disrupt the meeting. Shen "Feichang guohui", p.206.

²⁵¹See the letter sent by Wu's close associate to Wu on 12 May 1918 in "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.10-11 (document 10). This was also why many eminent Guomindang members were not necessarily opposed to the reorganization: See Tan Renfeng's statement in May 1918 in *Geming wenxian* 49:140-141.

political interests in the South would be able to participate in the decision-making process. The reorganization abolished the positions of Grand Marshals and Marshals, and instead replaced them with a seven-men Directorate. These seven directors represented a wide variety of political forces in the South: Cen Chunxuan for the Political Study Society; Tang Shaoyi, a long-time moderate Guomindang member; Wu Tingfang, a seasoned diplomat; Lin Baoyi, the Commander of the navy after Commander Cheng's death; Lu Rongting, Tang Jiyao, and Sun Yatsen himself. It was hoped, by Wu as well as by many other leaders in the South, that this would "bring about more cooperation among the different factions" in the fight against Duan Qirui.²⁵²

To Sun, this was of course a betrayal of the cause of true republicanism, but Sun felt this way only because he had identified himself with the latter. To the parliamentary members, Sun's attempt to become the provisional president, his ruthless effort to achieve success even at the expense of national interests, and his blatant disregard for the internal solidarity within the *hufa* camp, were all reminders that they could not totally depend on Sun for the cause of *hufa*. If Sun had wanted a *hufa* movement in which like-minded politicians would rally *behind* him and work *under* him, parliamentary members like Wu Jinglian preferred to have a grand alliance of pro-*hufa* forces which would *cooperate* with one another in the fight against Beijing.

²⁵²See Wu's letter to Sun explaining why he supported the reorganization: Dangshihui 404/15. Wu wanted Sun to remain within the new government after the reorganization, because Wu wanted a concerted effort against Beijing and did not want Sun to stand aside. See also Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, pp.139-140.

Who were the True Hufa Activists?

In retrospect, even though Sun Yatsen and Duan Qirui were on different ends of the political spectrum, they actually shared a lot of common ground when it comes to their views on the political situation in the late 1910s. Both of them believed that the constitutional system as it stood in 1917 could not continue to function. To Duan, the parliamentary institution had become too assertive of its powers at the expense of the executive,²⁵³ while to Sun, the system was crumbling because militarists like Duan were "practising dictatorship in the name of republicanism". Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus gave both of them a chance to bring about the "fundamental solution" they felt would resolve the constitutional crisis as they saw it, however different their solutions might be. Duan took the drastic step of refusing to recall the old parliament and revising electoral laws, while Sun launched a rebellion in the style of the 1911 Revolution.

By comparison, the solution of the parliamentary members in Canton to the constitutional crisis was by far the least radical: they merely asked for a recall of the old parliament and the restoration of the constitutional system as it stood on the eve of Zhang Xun's coup. Yet however limited their goals might be, it was they who deserved to be called the true protagonists of the *hufa* movement, not Sun or his associates. The irony of the Sun's effort was that even though he saw himself as the protector of the Provisional Constitution, he was ready to flout the latter whenever he felt expedient to do so. It was in fact parliamentary members like Wu Jinglian who insisted on keeping the law to the letter. The circumstances might have been difficult

²⁵³See chapter one.

for them, yet they did not waver in their belief in the importance of following constitutional procedures. In the end, it was precisely this insistence that helped to make them enemies of Sun.

Sun's failure to convince the parliamentary members to support him is telling of how much trouble his movement was in. If even parliamentary members, who should easily have been his staunchest supporters, were skeptical toward his movement, one can imagine how many obstacles he would have to face when he tried to solicit the support of other political groups and the general public. In the next two chapters, I will elaborate on those difficulties, and further flesh out the reasons why regional warlords like Lu Rongting, and the public in general, were not enthusiastic about a cause so strongly advocated by their revolutionary hero of 1911.

Chapter Three: *The Perspective from Lu Rongting and Guangdong, 1917-1918*

If Yunnan indeed has strength, it will not have any difficulties in exercising leadership over Sichuan and Guizhou. But if Sichuan and Guizhou are indeed going to be disobedient, then even if I were to have the empty title of the "Inspector-General" of the Three Provinces, the unity of the three provinces would not have benefitted. Now the fact that we are fighting so hard for this title will only damage my moral reputation and cause the disdain of the North. I hope you will not mention this demand from now on.

Tang Jiyao to his representative
in his negotiations with Beijing,
June 20, 1919²⁵⁴

This telegram was sent by the military governor of Yunnan, Tang Jiyao, who controlled Yunnan, Guizhou and much of Sichuan. Tang and other southern military leaders had been independent since 1917 when Duan Qirui refused to reconvene the old parliament, and this telegram was sent at a time when Tang went back to negotiate with the central government. Tang's key concern was to secure a firmer grip over the southwestern provinces of Sichuan and Guizhou. The contents of the telegram seems to be pure common sense: Why should he be seeking an empty title from the Beijing government? If Guizhou and Sichuan were to cause problems, then they would do so even if Tang were the Inspector-General of the three provinces. Was this not obvious? How could his subordinates be so wrong in their priorities?

What is curious is that Tang made this point only many months after both formal and informal negotiations had started, and only after his subordinates had tried with great effort to get him that position from the central government. In fact,

²⁵⁴"Tang Jiyao midian: Dianqianchuan zhanzheng", *Jindaishi ziliao*, No. 76 (1989), p.163.

confidential government documents deposited in the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing show that Tang had, contrary to his declared intentions, coveted the position of Inspector-General all along.²⁵⁵ This is puzzling: why did Tang want to have what he called an "empty title"? But if to us Tang's behavior is difficult to fathom, we must acknowledge that it was hardly unusual. The warlord of Guangxi and Guangdong, Lu Rongting, who had similarly declared his independence in mid-1917, was at this time also seeking to be the Inspector-General of Guangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Fujian.²⁵⁶ This raises the question: why did provincial warlords like Tang and Lu care so much about these central appointments, especially at a time when they were enjoying independence? If they were powerful militarily, was it not natural that they would be able to exercise their influence, with or without government recognition?

This is a particularly difficult question to answer, because the behavior of Lu and Tang does not fit well with our conventional understanding of the nature of politics and center-province relations in the early Republican period. Central to this understanding is the emphasis that after the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, China disintegrated into autonomous regions under provincial military commanders, with Beijing having little control over them. When Diana Lary writes that "after Yuan's fall in 1916, the last vestiges of Central authority disappeared",²⁵⁷ she is saying something with which historians generally agree. In many ways, the oft-used term "warlord politics" is intended to highlight not only the importance of the military in Republican

²⁵⁵See the confidential telegrams to the President's Office from the agent sent by Beijing to negotiate with Tang, May 23, May 28, June 1, June 8, 1919. SHA, 1003/848.

²⁵⁶Wei Ruilin, "Guixi junfa Lu Rongting zhuanji", *Xinan junfashi yanjiu congkan* ed. Xinan junfashi yanjiuhui 1:290.

²⁵⁷D. Lary, *Region and Nation: The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925-1937* p.15.

politics, but also the growing fragmentation of the country. The term, in addition, implies an antagonistic relationship between the center and the provinces. It is assumed that the center and the province not only competed for political power and military might, but in other aspects such as revenue as well.²⁵⁸ Yet if this interpretation is true, it will be difficult to explain adequately why warlords such as Tang Jiyao and Lu Rongting would seek appointments from Beijing. Why were they willing to acknowledge central authority at all?

These questions, if answered, will help us not only to understand the constitutional issue of center-province relations in this period, but also give us some clues to the attitudes of the Southern warlords toward the *hufa* movement. How did these warlords respond to the *hufa* movement? Did they try to use the movement to redefine their constitutional powers *vis-a-vis* the center? To answer these questions, I will study closely the behavior of Lu Rongting, the military overlord of Guangdong and Guangxi. I will examine why Lu was keen to negotiate with Beijing in 1917-1919 during the *hufa* movement, when he could easily have used the movement as a pretext to detach Guangdong and Guangxi permanently from the central government and assert complete independence.²⁵⁹ Through my analysis I hope to highlight how the

²⁵⁸See in particular the excellent work of H.S. Ch'i, *Warlord Politics: 1916-1928*. See also J. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*; D. Lary, "Warlord Studies", *Modern China*, vol.6 no.4 (Oct., 1980), pp.441-444; J. Chen, *Junshen zhengquan*, esp. chps.1-3. There is a virtual consensus on the "disintegration" of the country; the only debate is about whether it started in 1912 or 1916: see Lary, "Warlord Studies", pp.442-443.

²⁵⁹Diana Lary explores this question in a paragraph in her book *Region and Nation*, in which she writes, "His (Lu Rongting's) conception of regional independence remained that of local authority conferred by a higher authority -- that is, Peking. He felt uncomfortable operating outside a centralised framework, the framework within which he had operated as an officer of the Imperial times. The capital had lost its power to control its provinces, but it had not lost a moral suasion, a capacity to confer legitimisation, which worked strongly on men who lacked the intellectual self-confidence of revolutionaries, on men who had found no new focus of loyalty." p.30. I find this too impressionistic an explanation. As I will show, there were very specific reasons why Lu sought recognition from the central government.

Southern regional militarists view the constitution, and what factors accounted for the attitudes they took toward the constitutional struggle.

Guangdong Before Hufa

Lu Rongting (1859-1928), a native of Wuming, Guangxi, was a bandit chief who joined the Qing army during the year when the First Sino-Japanese War broke out (1894). He climbed the official hierarchy quickly, and on the eve of the Wuchang Revolution (1911), he was already the provincial military commander of Guangxi. The 1911 revolution did not undermine his power, and his predominant position in Guangxi was quickly confirmed by the new Republican government. In the next few years he consolidated his rule over the province. It was purely fortuitous circumstances, however, that allowed Lu to expand his power into neighboring Guangdong. When Yuan Shikai tried to become emperor in late 1915, Yunnan declared its independence, and Lu was sent to suppress the "rebellion" together with the military governor of Guangdong, Long Jiguang.²⁶⁰ But a few early victories of the Yunnan army prompted Lu to shift allegiance, and in early 1916 he marched his troops into Guangdong with his Yunnan allies and defeated Long's armies. This established Lu's power in Guangdong. In July 1916, his position was recognized by Beijing, which duly appointed him the military governor of the province. By late 1916 Lu had clearly become the leading militarist in the South, with both Guangdong and Guangxi under his control.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰For Long, see H. Boorman, R. Howard eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* 2:455-457.

²⁶¹Boorman ed., *Biographical Dictionary* 2:447-449; Wei, "Lu Rongting".

The end of Yuan Shikai's regime did not serve to weaken the ties between Guangdong and Beijing, but on the contrary to pull the two sides back together after the tumultuous months in late 1915 and early 1916. With Li Yuanhong as the new President, Guangdong ended its independence and put itself back under central authority not only in name, but also in fact. One good indication of this was the resumption of the remittance of Guangdong's land taxes to the central government, which had been discontinued during the anti-monarchical movement.²⁶² On the surface, it is puzzling why Lu would have to do this, especially in light of his growing power in the South. But a careful analysis of center-province politics in the immediate post-Yuan months indicates that the province had much to gain from this relationship. While the remittance of land taxes was now resumed, the Finance Ministry in Beijing was in fact lenient on how much Guangdong had to remit. When the Guangdong government pleaded for help in late 1916, claiming that Guangdong was in serious financial trouble because of the military expenses in the previous year, the Finance Ministry allowed not only a deferral of payments, but also a reduction in amount.²⁶³ Furthermore, Lu's support for the central government brought about the latter's financial backing in his effort to rebuild the finances of Guangdong after the anti-monarchical wars. For instance, the central government granted generous subsidies to help Guangdong to clear its debts and pay its soldiers. Despite legal prohibitions, Guangdong was temporarily allowed to raise taxes through gambling, much to the

²⁶²The remittance in the 1916 fiscal year (i.e. July 1916 to June 1917) was a quarter of a million yuan. See Jia Shiyi, *Minguo xu caizhengshi*, 1:59.

²⁶³*Huazi ribao*. Jan. 1, 1917, p.11. The actual remittance (250,000 yuan) was certainly small: Jia, *Caizheng*, 1:58-59.

displeasure of certain parliamentary members.²⁶⁴ Moreover, the central government helped Guangdong to raise money by acting as the guarantor of its loans. This was very significant, because otherwise banks were often reluctant to consider major loans to Guangdong due to the province's unstable conditions.²⁶⁵

Furthermore, Lu's submission to Beijing meant that the latter had a vested interest in protecting Lu's position in Guangdong. Lu was far from secure in his position, with his greatest threat coming from Long Jiguang, who was the military governor of Guangdong before him. Although Long was defeated in mid-1916, he continued to be a potent enemy, not least because he was backed by Duan Qirui, the Premier and the predominant military leader at that time. Though Duan duly appointed Lu to be the military governor of Guangdong in July 1916 and transferred Long to Hainan Island, he also permitted Long to delay his withdrawal to Hainan. As a consequence Long was able to extract financial resources from Guangdong before he left.²⁶⁶ Lu must have been well aware of the fact that if he failed to cooperate with Beijing, it would only be to the advantage of his opponents.

²⁶⁴SHA 1002/13 (2), House of Representatives to the cabinet, Dec. 13, 1917. Representative Zou Lu questioned why the cabinet would grant this exemption.

²⁶⁵This is very apparent from the negotiations for a loan from the Japanese Bank of Taiwan in early 1917. The Bank was initially reluctant to lend Guangdong any money, even though Guangdong was willing to mortgage its Cement Factory for the loan. It was only after Beijing agreed to serve as the guarantor that the loan went through. See CCER, Feb. 27, 1917, March 28, 1917. These are the intelligent reports of the Guangdong Customs. Earlier Beijing also acted as the guarantor of a 3-million Hong Kong dollar loan from a Dutch merchant, and promised to pay up should Guangdong default: *Huazi Ribao* Jan. 1, 1917. This loan was in the end cancelled because the Dutch merchant failed to come up with the money.

²⁶⁶Li, *Political History*, pp.348-349; Wei, "Lu Rongting", pp.287-288.

Yet Lu paid a price for this relationship with Beijing. As mentioned, he had to remit part of Guangdong's land taxes to Beijing. Furthermore, he had to allow Beijing to be part of the decision-making process regarding the affairs of Guangdong. One clear sign of central authority lay in the appointment of the civil governor. Lu would have wanted one of his own associates to take up that position, but he could not prevent Beijing from appointing the former civil governor of Heilongjiang, Zhu Qinglan, to the post.²⁶⁷ Although the power of the civil governor at this time was no longer comparable to that during Yuan Shikai's regime, the post was by no means purely honorary.²⁶⁸ In Guangdong, Zhu was in charge of the twenty police squad battalions reorganized from the Guangdong anti-monarchical armies and Long Jiguang's personal guards.²⁶⁹ Despite Lu's repeated attempts to take over those battalions, he was not able to do so.²⁷⁰ Furthermore, even though the Guangdong elites were initially skeptical toward Zhu, Zhu soon won widespread support by presenting himself as an incorruptible reformer who was concerned with Guangdong affairs.²⁷¹ On the whole, nevertheless, Lu was given much autonomy in Guangdong, especially regarding military affairs. For instance, his recommendations for key

²⁶⁷For Zhu, see Li Jiezhi, "Zhu Qinglan", 31:122-124.

²⁶⁸In 1914, Yuan Shikai introduced measures to increase the power of civil governors, a move aimed at preventing military governors from becoming too powerful. This effort was successful at first, but collapsed with his demise in 1916. See E. Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-k'ai*, pp.157-160.

²⁶⁹Mo Shixiang, *Hufa yundongshi*, pp.85-86.

²⁷⁰A series of negotiations concerning the size and control of these troops were conducted between Lu and Zhu in late 1916. The end result was that although Zhu agreed to reduce the size of the police squad, he retained the control of it. See SHA 1011/1098.

²⁷¹For instance, Zhu made it his priority to combat corruption in the provincial government as soon as he assumed power: CCER, Sept. 23, 1916. He also strongly opposed the legalization of gambling, and this endeared him to the Guangdong populace: SHA 679/32409 CCER, Dec. 18, 1916.

military appointments in the province were seldom challenged.²⁷² Lu's leverage can also be seen in the selection of the military governor. When Lu became the Inspector-General of Guangdong and Guangxi in April 1917, thus leaving the military governorship of Guangdong open, he recommended Chen Bingkun, his protege, for the post. Beijing accepted the recommendation without question.²⁷³

Regionalism and the Constitutional Crisis

Events in the summer of 1917, however, were to make this relationship between Beijing and Guangdong untenable. In the midst of the power struggle between President Li Yuanhong and Premier Duan Qirui in June, Lu instructed Governor Chen Bingkun to announce the "temporary independence" of Guangdong on June 20. Lu and Chen declared that Guangdong would from now on obey no one but Li Yuanhong, a move aimed at bolstering the position of Li.²⁷⁴ The support for Li was not surprising: Li had been very sympathetic to Lu throughout his presidency; opinion in Guangdong was overwhelmingly in favor of Li;²⁷⁵ and Lu was still suspicious of Duan's friendship with Long. Nevertheless, Lu soon found himself on the losing side, because Li was disgraced by his attempt to align with Zhang Xun, who instead took the opportunity to restore the Manchus. Duan Qirui's position, on the other hand, was greatly strengthened, because by crushing Zhang's coup he became the hero who saved

²⁷²For instance, his recommendations for several important military positions in Guangdong in September 1916, were accepted without question: SHA 1011/1098.

²⁷³Wei, "Lu Rongting", p.289.

²⁷⁴Wei, "Lu Rongting", p.289.

²⁷⁵USDS 893.00/2690, Heintzleman to Reinsch, June 23, 1917.

the republic from the Manchus. Immediately after the affair, Duan reclaimed the premiership, announced his intention of calling a new parliament, and started to plan for revisions in electoral laws. The problem for Lu was that he now had to deal with someone whom he had denounced only a month earlier, and someone who was surely going to be less sympathetic toward his rule in Guangdong than President Li had been. As it turned out, Duan indeed intended to increase Beijing's influence in the South. In August 1917, Duan replaced the military governors of Sichuan and Hunan with his own men, clearly trying to extend the power of Beijing in areas where control was previously only limited.²⁷⁶ Lu knew that the old balance of power between the center and the province was under threat.

Lu, of course, could simply turn the "temporary independence", which he proclaimed in June, permanent. In response to Duan's refusal to reconvene the old parliament, in July 1917, Sun Yatsen led a group of parliamentary members to Guangzhou to establish a rival military government to protect the constitution. If Lu wanted to detach Guangdong from Beijing, he could easily do so in the name of the constitution. This he did not do, but instead he continued to announce his intention of ending Guangdong's temporary independence. All he wanted from Beijing, he claimed, was to have a say in certain key appointments in the South, such as the provincial military governors. The fact that Duan sent his troops to Hunan in September did not change this posture of compromise, and even his crushing victory against Duan's armies near Changsha in November did not whet his appetite for independence.²⁷⁷ Why? The circumstances, it would seem, were so ideal for Lu to be

²⁷⁶McCord, *Chinese Warlordism*, pp.253-259.

²⁷⁷See Wei, "Lu Rongting", pp.289-290. See also USDS 893.00/2748, Heintzleman to Reinsch, Nov. 21, 1917. Lu and his associates made it clear to Beijing that everything was negotiable, and that they

his own man, but why was he reluctant take up this opportunity? Why did he still want to subject himself to central authority?

Contemporaries knew the answer to this question. Firstly, even though the Southern armies were picking up some key victories in the early stage of the war, few believed that the Southern provinces would be able to defeat the Northern provinces in the long run.²⁷⁸ This widespread pessimism is very understandable. Not only did Beijing have more resources because of its control over more provinces and because of its access to the Customs surplus, but it also had the ability to raise large foreign loans because it had the recognition of the foreign powers. In fact, immediately after Duan resumed his premiership, he managed to negotiate a huge loan of 145 million yen from Japan.²⁷⁹ In addition to this, the years 1917 and 1918 were financially good years for the government. The high value of silver, which had contributed to higher earnings in the Customs, and the suspension of indemnity payments and the payment of German loans, had put Beijing in an extraordinarily favorable financial position.²⁸⁰ In terms of resources, therefore, Lu must have known that the Southern provinces were no match.

Furthermore, just as Beijing could be an invaluable ally, it could also turn itself to become a deadly enemy. Lu understood very well that Beijing would not hesitate to

were not even trying to strike a tough bargain. USDS 893.00/2756, Heintzleman to Reinsch, Dec. 14, 1917. This willingness to negotiate was perhaps the reason why there were persistent rumours in 1917 and 1918 that Lu was about to end Guangdong's independence. See CCER, Dec. 21, 1917, Dec. 26, 1917.

²⁷⁸See for instance, *Shibao*, Aug. 3, 1917, p.2.

²⁷⁹See Li, *Political History*, p.514. For the details of the loan, see Liu Binglin, *Jindai zhongguo waizhai shigao*, pp.125-156.

²⁸⁰Great Britain, The Foreign Office, "Confidential Prints: Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of China, 405/205 Jordan to Balfour, Feb. 27, 1918.

support his enemies if he defied its authority. Long Jiguang, who was in Hainan Island at this time, was too close for comfort, and could easily attack Guangdong from the south at a time when Lu was preoccupied with the northern front. This was why as soon as his negotiations with Beijing broke down in the fall of 1917, Lu sent his agents to Hainan Island to try to strike an alliance with Long before Duan could do so.²⁸¹ But Lu had much less to offer than Duan did. In November, Duan dismissed Lu from the office of the Inspector-General of Liang-Guang, and appointed Long to succeed him.²⁸² In addition, Beijing offered generous financial help to Long to retake Guangdong. Although Long was eventually defeated in April 1918, for many months he was a major threat to Lu and the Southern provinces.²⁸³

Lu Rongting and His Enemies in Guangdong

The dangers for Lu came also from forces within Guangdong. While the state of independence increased Lu's powers because he was now the master of his own fate in Guangdong, it also entailed grave consequences which could seriously undermine his position in Guangdong. For instance, the independence spelt financial disaster for Lu and Governor Chen. The need to prepare the province militarily for an outside attack necessitated an increase in military spending, with which Lu and Chen found

²⁸¹Tang Jiayao started to negotiate with Long even before Lu did. See Danganguan, *Hufa*, pp.528-536. See also *Yishibao*, Sept. 23, 1917, p.3. In the beginning there were rumors that Long would help the South. USDS 893.00/2730 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Oct. 30, 1917; USDS 893.00/2742 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Nov. 2, 1917.

²⁸²USDS 893.00/2766 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Jan. 2, 1918. Heintzleman believed that Long probably would not be able to capture Guangdong, but in the early weeks Long was able to capture several districts of the province. Tao, *Beiyang*, 2:722-723.

²⁸³Tao, *Beiyang*, 2:765.

impossible to cope.²⁸⁴ Although Guangdong no longer had to remit taxes back to Beijing,²⁸⁵ the savings in this area amounted to only a small fraction of the rising expenditure.²⁸⁶ In fact, Customs officials in Guangdong reported that the government was so hard pressed for revenue that it was selling not only property at bargain prices but also, incredibly enough, one of its gunboats.²⁸⁷ In addition, to secure the loans necessary to pay for the military expenses, the government had to mortgage some of its valuable assets, notably the Guangdong Telephone Administration, to a Japanese company.²⁸⁸

This tight financial situation had far-reaching implications, because it heightened the existing tensions within the regime of Lu and Chen, whose rule in Guangdong had never been secure in the first place because they were from Guangxi and not Guangdong natives. The rising military expenditure increased the

²⁸⁴*Shibao*, July 17, 1917, p.2. The intelligence reports from the Customs of Guangzhou showed that it was a desperate situation. *CCER*, July 20, 1917, July 31, 1917, Oct. 29, 1917

²⁸⁵SHA 679/32410 *CCER*, July 11, 1917.

²⁸⁶*Huazi ribao*, April 5, 1918, p.2.

²⁸⁷*CCER*, Nov. 7, 1917. The available sources we have do not allow us to know exactly how much the increase was. The expenditure of the Guangdong government between July 1917 and June 1918 was 33,478,000 yuan, up from 31,473,000 yuan the previous fiscal year. Although the increase seems small, the figures are misleading. Firstly, the expenditure July 1916-June 1917 was actually a very high figure because of the anti-monarchical wars in 1916: USDS 893.00/2575, Heintzeleman to Reinsch, April 5, 1917. In early 1917, Lu and Chen were trying to put Guangdong's finances back on track after the huge deficit earlier. More importantly, this figure includes only the money spent by the Guangdong Finance Ministry. We know that immediately after the split with the north, various armies, especially divisions of the Yunnan army, openly retained the locally-collected taxes for use on the spot: see *Shibao*, July 14, 1917, p.4. This is not to say that they had not done so before [see Sutton, *Provincial Militarism*, p.240], but they were now doing it in a much more assertive fashion. This explains why government revenue was said to have increased only slightly in 1917-1918 despite the sale of government property and the legalization of gambling. So the amount of money spent by Guangdong was actually more substantial than the figures can tell. For the figures, see Qin Qingjun, "Minguo shiqi Guangdong caizheng shiliao", *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* 29:89.

²⁸⁸*CCER*, Nov. 16, 1917.

unpopularity of the regime, because its effects were commonly felt by the Guangdong populace. For instance, many military commanders began to take away local taxes earmarked for local and provincial uses for their armies.²⁸⁹ We also have plenty of evidence that the populace was asked to pay more taxes so that the provincial government could cope with the crisis.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, to pay for the deficit, Chen was now compelled to work more closely with the provincial elites, which had more or less been a non-factor in decision-making since Lu's arrival. Chen, for example, was forced to ask for the cooperation of the provincial assembly in his proposal for legalizing gambling, a measure which would bring in six million yuan annually to the Treasury through the sale of the monopoly. But when Chen discovered that he was not getting the members' blessings because of the measure's unpopularity, he caused a scandal by bribing and coercing the members to get it passed by the assembly nonetheless.²⁹¹

This added fuel to the fire. Even before the financial crisis there was widespread dissatisfaction against Lu and Chen's rule in Guangdong. Now the discontent grew and found a way to express itself. In many ways, Lu and Chen, both Guangxi natives, ruled Guangdong like a colony. They favored Guangxi natives in

²⁸⁹*Shibao*, July 14, 1917, p.4. For instance, in Shaoguan under the Yunnan army commander Li Genyuan, there were all kinds of new taxes for military purposes. Huang Zongru, "Jiuguixi tongzhi Guangdong shiqi Li Genyuan zai Shaoguan Hainan de huodong jiqi shibai". *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*, 10:60-73.

²⁹⁰The precise amount we do not know. Sun Yatsen claimed in January 1918 that the provincial government had increased tax collections by as much as 10 million yuan since the declaration of independence. Even though this might be an exaggerated figure, and even though this figure probably included the revenue from the legalization of gambling, I think it is clear that the Guangdong people were forced to pay more taxes. *CCER*, Jan. 18, 1918.

²⁹¹USDS 893.00/2685 Heintzeleman to Reinsch, July 2, 1917; *Shibao*, July 14, 1917, p.4; *Yishibao*, Sept. 19, 1917, p.3; Li Peisheng, "Guixi juyue zhi youlai jiqi jingguo" *Geming wenxian* 51:18-19.

their official appointments. They used Guangdong money to pay for the Guangxi troops stationed in Guangdong. There were even reports that money and arms were transported away from Guangdong for use in Guangxi.²⁹² The financial crisis, and Chen's high-handed measures in dealing with it, strengthened the determination of the Guangdong elites to assert themselves and reclaim some of the powers which had been lost to the "outsiders". In these troubled times, Lu found himself facing a backlash of Guangdong provincialism directed against his alien regime.

This was apparent when Beijing ordered Governor Zhu Qinglan to exchange positions with the civil governor of Guangxi, Liu Chengen, in early August 1917.²⁹³ Chen accepted the order with glee, because he had for long considered Zhu a major obstacle to his exercising greater control over the province. Immediately Chen announced that, as military governor, he would shoulder the responsibilities of the civil governor before the new governor arrived.²⁹⁴ The provincial elites were shocked. They saw this as a blatant attempt by Chen to expand his powers, they would remain silent no more. In a statement on August 5, members of the provincial assembly virulently condemned Chen. They questioned why Chen was still obeying orders from Beijing when the latter was clearly an illegitimate government. They also declared their support for Zhu, and added that even if Zhu were to leave, it was not legal for

²⁹²*Yishibao*, Oct. 26, 1917, p.3; CCER, Nov. 22, 1917.

²⁹³Government documents deposited in the Second Historical Archives show that it was Lu who asked Beijing to remove Zhu. These documents show that there was still a great deal of communication between Guangdong and Beijing at this time, and that Beijing was not unwilling to placate Lu even though Lu had declared his temporary independence. See SHA 1003/322.

²⁹⁴This was significant, because no one knew when Liu would come, if he was to come at all. As it turned out, Liu did not come to assume office.

Chen to assume the duties of the civil governor while the post was vacant.²⁹⁵ Various other civilian organizations also petitioned to the provincial assembly urging Zhu to stay.²⁹⁶ When in late August Zhu finally decided to resign from the governorship, the provincial assembly, without prior consultation with Chen, took it upon itself to select a new civil governor. The members chose Hu Hanmin, a Guangdong native, a close associate of Sun Yatsen, and the military governor of Guangdong in the years 1912-1913.²⁹⁷ This was a direct challenge to the authority of Chen.²⁹⁸ Although eventually a compromise candidate, Li Yaohan, also a Guangdong native, was chosen to be the new civil governor, it was a moral victory for the assembly. The assembly was successful not only in snatching the civil governorship from Chen and his associates, but also in forcing Chen to concede the principle that the civil governor had to be a Guangdong native.²⁹⁹

The Guangdong elites only aimed to reclaim powers which they saw as rightfully theirs, and ultimately had no wish to break with Lu. But the same cannot be said for some Guangdong soldiers who experienced first-hand how Lu discriminated against them. While Lu's Guangxi troops were always well-paid, the Guangdong troops received much inferior treatment.³⁰⁰ In October 1917, the divisions in Shantou, led by Commander Mo Qingyu, decided to take advantage of the chaotic political

²⁹⁵ *Shibao*, Aug. 5, 1917, p.3.

²⁹⁶ *Shibao*, Aug. 10, 1917, p.3; *Yishibao*, Aug. 12, 1917, p.3.

²⁹⁷ *Shibao*, Sept. 2, 1917, p.4.

²⁹⁸ Especially because it was well-known that Chen did not genuinely welcome the presence of Sun and the Guomindang members.

²⁹⁹ Peng Zhifang, "Sishinian conjun jingli yu jianwen", *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* 62:169.

³⁰⁰ *Yishibao*, Oct. 26, 1917, p.3.

situation and rebelled against Governor Chen. One reason why they dared to do so was that they had the full backing of the central government. Beijing supplied them with money and arms, and instructed Fujian to help Mo in whatever ways it could.³⁰¹ On October 25, they issued a declaration detailing their grievances: how they never received full pay while the Guangxi troops were "at liberty to take what they wanted"; "how military officers of Guangdong birth were given no duty to do while Chen's kin occupied important posts"; and how Chen Bingkun legalized gambling and hurt the Guangdong people.³⁰² The rebels made it clear that they were not rebelling against Guangdong, but only Chen Bingkun and the Guangxi clique. This rebellion was eventually suppressed, but it sheds light on the dire situation Lu and Chen were facing.

Indeed, although the state of independence freed Lu and Chen from the central government, it also made them dependent on soldiers whom they had for long ill-treated and whose loyalty was at best suspect. The Guangdong troops in Shantou may have been exceptional in that they raised a full-scale rebellion, but they were certainly not alone in feeling that Lu and Chen had discriminated against them. The Yunnan army was a case in point. The Yunnan soldiers were the main fighting force in defeating Long Jiguang in 1916, but after the war they were left in an awkward position.³⁰³ While it was too expensive to sustain them, it was equally expensive to disband them or send them back to Yunnan. As a result, the Yunnan soldiers were left in a state of bare subsistence in Guangdong. Lu did nothing to alleviate the situation, and seemed to have forgotten the fact that it was these Yunnan soldiers who helped

³⁰¹USDS 893.00/2742 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Nov. 2, 1917.

³⁰²See Danganguan, *Hufa*, pp.587-588. An English version of their declaration is enclosed in USDS 893.00/2746 Myers to Reinsch, Oct. 31, 1917.

³⁰³Sutton, *Provincial Militarism*, chp.9.

him to establish his predominant position in Guangdong the first place. If anything, Lu often worsened the situation by explicitly favoring his Guangxi troops. During the winter of 1916-1917, many Yunnan soldiers were reported dead because of the lack of food and winter clothing.³⁰⁴

Independence, however, made the Yunnan troops once again indispensable for defending the province, and they surely took full advantage of it. Immediately after the declaration of independence, many Yunnan commanders started to retain the locally-collected taxes, arguing that they needed them for military purposes. Although the commanders had done this on a limited basis in the past, they were now doing more assertive than ever before.³⁰⁵ The frustration for Chen was that he knew he had to accept these moves, because he desperately needed the support of these troops to repel the northern invaders in Duan's armies and the southern invaders in Long Jiguang.

Sun Yatsen and the Politics of Hufa

It is not far from the truth, therefore, to say that Guangdong's independence benefitted Lu and Chen's enemies more than it benefitted Lu and Chen themselves. Furthermore, as they were to find out, powers wrested from the central government did not necessarily become their own. If Lu could now ignore the wishes of the Beijing

³⁰⁴Sutton, *Provincial Militarism*, pp.238-240.

³⁰⁵*Shibao*, July 14, 1917, p.4. A military conference was convened immediately after the independence, and the Yunnan commanders, notably Li Liejun, were becoming aggressive in their demands: USDS 893.00/2685 Heintzleman to Reinsch, July 2, 1917. There were also fears that there would be clashes between the Guangxi and Yunnan troops: CCER, Aug. 31, 1917.

government, he found out that he had to deal with another government: Sun Yatsen's military government in Guangzhou. Since historians have until now focussed on how Lu sabotaged the *hufa* movement and victimized Sun, we have neglected how Lu himself was in many ways victimized by Sun.³⁰⁶ Lu was understandably very disturbed when Sun brought along his entourage and about a hundred parliamentary members to Guangzhou set up a military government in July 1917, not least because Sun did not have his consent before coming down.³⁰⁷ Although Sun did not possess an army, one must not underestimate his threat to Lu, not only because of Sun's close connections with some of the Yunnan soldiers in Guangdong,³⁰⁸ but also because he brought with him part of the Chinese navy.

Moreover, the people who accompanied Sun to Guangzhou were very well-respected in Guangdong, and they could easily become the rallying point of the discontented elements in Guangdong. Sun himself needs no introduction. Cheng Biguang was the chief naval commander. Hu Hanmin was the military governor in 1912-1913, and Chen Jiongming was the person who succeeded Hu in that post.³⁰⁹ All of them were Guangdong natives, and all of them, except Cheng, were heroes of the 1911 Revolution. It is therefore not surprising that as soon as Sun and his

³⁰⁶ Basically all accounts of the *hufa* movement up to now are sympathetic to Sun: Mo, *Hufa*; Shao, "Zongli", 7:5-27; Shang Mingxuan, "Shouci hufa yundong zhongde Sun Zhongshan". *Sun Zhongshan he ta de shidai* ed. Sun Zhongshan yanjiu xuehui, 1:770-789.

³⁰⁷ Sun did send his agents to solicit the support of Lu: Pan Naide, "Sun Zhongshan xiangsheng dui laoguixi junfa Lu Rongting de zhengqu yo taifa". *Guangxi wenshi ziliao*, 7:209-212, but he did not have the consent of Lu before proceeding to Guangzhou: Wang Jiangang "Guohui shenghuo de pianduan huiyi". *Wenshi ziliao*, 82:187-188.

³⁰⁸ Notably the soldiers under the divisional commander Zhang Kairu.

³⁰⁹ For Cheng, see Mo Rufei, "Cheng Biguang xunguoji", *Geming wenxian* 49:355-400; for Hu Hanmin, see Zhou, *Hu Hanmin*; for Chen Jiongming, see Hsieh, "Ch'en Chiung-ming".

associates settled down in Guangdong, discontented elements in Guangdong sought their leadership in their opposition to Lu and Chen. This was already apparent in the election of Hu Hanmin as the civil governor by the provincial assembly against Governor Chen's wish in late August. This may also be seen in the campaign to oust Chen from the military governorship in November 1917. Chen had been a very unpopular figure for many reasons: his legalization of gambling, his favoritism towards Guangxi natives, and his poor treatment of Yunnan and Guangdong soldiers.³¹⁰ Sun's role was to provide leadership to the Yunnan soldiers and the provincial elites, who now felt confident enough to demand that Lu replace Chen or face the consequences. On November 15, Sun even launched an unsuccessful military coup to topple Chen. In the end, Lu and Chen were under so much pressure that Chen had to resign.³¹¹

This was only the beginning. As Lu was to find out, Sun's military government would not hesitate to encroach upon the prerogatives of his Guangdong administration. This is not surprising. Since Sun saw his military government, albeit imperfect and temporary, as a "national" government, naturally he would see the Guangdong provincial government as under its control. Lu, however, would not give up his powers without a fight. He instructed Chen not to acknowledge Sun as the grand marshal of the military government. He insisted that Sun pay his own way, and that

³¹⁰679/32410 *CCER*, Nov. 22, 1917.

³¹¹USDS 893.00/2748 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Nov. 21, 1917; For the failure of the coup, see *CCER*, Nov. 19, 1917. When later Mo Rongxin became the new military governor, the provincial elites again came together to ask Sun to lead them against the governor: Ma, "Gensui Sun Zhongshan", 1:149.

the Guangdong government not shoulder any of Sun's expenses. He also made clear that he had nothing to do with the military government.³¹²

Yet Lu could not afford to ignore Sun totally, because Sun enjoyed considerable support in the early days of the military government, especially from the Yunnan soldiers under Commander Zhang Kairu.³¹³ This was why however hard Lu tried to stop Sun, Sun still managed to make considerable headway in expanding the powers of his military government. Mo Rongxin, the successor of Governor Chen, was forced to give up the 20 police squad battalions which used to be under the command of the civil governor but had since the independence been placed under the control of the military governor.³¹⁴ Furthermore, Sun started to recruit civilians for an army of the military government. Mo tried hard to stop Sun,³¹⁵ but with little success.

Sun was equally aggressive in his effort to draw revenue for his military government. In March 1918, he took over the Salt Inspectorate in Guangdong, despite the opposition of the diplomatic corps, and began to allot a majority of its surplus revenue to his administration.³¹⁶ This was done with full knowledge that Lu and Mo

³¹²Shao, "Zongli", 7:18-19.

³¹³Tang Jiayao was angry with Zhang for Zhang's support for Sun. See Chen, *Nianpu changbian*, 1:1099-1100, 1108-1109.

³¹⁴Guo Qiaoran et. al., "Yuejun shishi jiayao". *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*, 31:1-10; Luo Yiqun, "Ji Sun Zhongshan", 25:69-104. Sun made it clear that unless Lu and Chen gave him the control of this army, he would insist upon the selection of Hu Hanmin as the civil governor.

³¹⁵Lu Danlin, "Mo Rongxin pohuai junzhengfu mubing". *Sun Zhongshan sanci* ed. Weiyuanhui, pp.95-99.

³¹⁶One-third of the income was kept for the repayment of foreign loans, and Sun kept the rest. In months with high income, Sun would receive about 400,000 yuan: 100,000 yuan for the parliament; 50,000 yuan for the military government; 130,000 yuan for the navy; 90,000 yuan for the Guangdong

wanted the salt taxes themselves, and that they had not seized them only because of their fear of foreign protests.³¹⁷ Sun's assertiveness in extracting revenue can also be gauged in the incident in which a company promised Sun funding for his military government if he would legalize more forms of gambling. Sun did not refuse the offer, but in fact promised to "persuade" Governor Mo on his behalf to accept the proposal.³¹⁸ The growing power of Sun was not lost on contemporaries. The British consul in Guangzhou believed that if Sun were not stopped, he would soon take control of the provincial treasury and the mint.³¹⁹ Sun's subordinate, Chen Jiongming, who was the commander of the reorganized police squad stationed in Huizhou, also repeatedly refused to remit taxes back to Guangzhou. Arguing that he needed all the taxes for his army, Commander Chen took over all the locally-collected taxes despite the disapproval of Governor Mo.³²⁰

In many ways, the military government was acting no differently than any central authority in Beijing, but was perhaps even more aggressive in extending its powers. This is very apparent in the issue of official appointments within the province. As I have already described, Sun interfered with the selection of the civil governor in September 1917. Again, in November, he was instrumental in forcing Chen Bingkun to resign. In January 1918, Sun started another coup, this time against

government under Mo. The rest was used for the military expenses of the military government. Mo, *Hufa*, p.122.

³¹⁷Lu and his associates tried to do the same thing in Feb. 1918, but when the diplomatic corps protested, they backed down: USDS 893.00/2824, Heintzleman to Reinsch, March 20, 1918. Mo tried to stop Sun's move (*Huazi ribao*, March 16, 1918, p.11), but he was not successful. Apparently Sun even considered taking over the Customs as well.

³¹⁸*Huazi ribao*, March 20, 1918, p.2.

³¹⁹Reported in USDS 893.00/2824, Heintzleman to Reinsch, March 20, 1918.

³²⁰*Huazi ribao*, April 16, 1918, p.2; April 26, 1918, p.2; May 1, 1918, p.2.

Governor Mo. Although it failed because the navy and the Yunnan soldiers were unwilling to back him up, Sun was able to intimidate Governor Mo by this show of force.³²¹ By March 1918, Sun had basically replaced all centrally-appointed officials in the province with his associates, including the Customs, the provincial judiciary, and the administration of the railways in the province. Ironically, though Lu had won independence from the central Government in Beijing, he now came under the grip of Sun's military government which was right in Guangzhou. What was worse was that Sun's military government was even less willing to concede powers to his provincial regime than Beijing had been. Indeed, the U.S. consul-general in Guangzhou reported in March 1918 that Sun was increasingly aggressive in his policy, and Mo had to allow him to appoint whomever he liked in the provincial administration, excepting the army and provincial treasury.³²² The conflict between the provincial and the military governments was becoming serious. In early May, *Huazi ribao* reported an incident in which the agents of Sun went to a county to recruit people into the army. The local magistrate was confused because although they came from the military government, they were doing something proclaimed illegal by the military governor. Furthermore, the magistrate had no prior knowledge that there would be a recruitment, and he was unsure whether those agents had the proper authority.³²³ This incident, I think, sums up the burning question at that time very well: who was in charge, and of what?

³²¹For an account of the coup, see Liu Deze, "Yuanshuaifu", 49:132-135; Lu, "Zongli paojiao", 49:135-136. Although the coup was not successful, it strengthened Sun's position: USDS 893.00/2778 Heintzleman to Reinsch, Jan. 11, 1918.

³²²USDS 893.00/2806 Heintzleman to Reinsch, March 5, 1918; *Huazi ribao*, March 20, 1918, p.2.

³²³*Huazi ribao*, May 4, 1918, p.2.

Conclusions

In light of the above, it is understandable why a provincial warlord like Lu Rongting would prefer Beijing's control to independence, and why Lu would help to bring about the reorganization of the Military government in May 1918. Lu made it clear from the very beginning that independence was not his aim. He looked to the North for guarantees: that the North would withdraw its armies; that the North would give the South a certain degree of autonomy, like the control over the selection of its own military governors; that the North would help the South in the South's financial problems, and so on.³²⁴ Lu's aim was to restore a constitutional relationship between Guangdong and Beijing which had been mutually beneficial until the events in the summer of 1917 ruined it.

The experience of Guangdong during the years of 1916-1919, I believe, will force us to rethink our conventional assumptions concerning "warlordism" and center-province relationships in the Republican period. One key element of the warlord model is the emphasis on the disintegration of China into independent kingdoms after the death of Yuan Shikai. As I have shown in the case of Guangdong, this is highly misleading, even though Guangdong has often been seen to be where central power was at its weakest.³²⁵ Lu Rongting was, contrary to what we may have assumed, very willing to acknowledge central authority, partly because he saw the advantages of doing so, but more importantly because he realized that the true beneficiaries of a

³²⁴These were the main demands of Lu Rongting from 1917 to 1919. While the parliament question was an important issue to many people, Lu was apparently very flexible on this issue. "Ma Fengchi", p.69.

³²⁵Guangdong was involved in every movement against Beijing in the early Republican period: the Second Revolution (1913), the Anti-Monarchical movement (1915-1916) and now the *Hufa* movement.

permanent break with Beijing would be his opponents, not himself. As I have argued, independence, which necessitated further militarization, heightened the tensions within Lu's regime, and served only to strengthen his factional rivals.³²⁶ It is not without a touch of irony that it was precisely because of "factionalism" in the Southern provinces, something which has often been used to explain China's political problems during the Republican period, that pulled Guangdong to the center.³²⁷ Lu understood the situation very well. He realized that powers wrested from the central government might only end up in the hands of his enemies, and that was why he persistently wanted negotiations, not war.

This study of the relationship between Beijing and Guangdong also sheds light on the nature of the military government during the *hufa* movement and Sun's relationship with the Guangdong elites in the late 1910s. One question it poses is: if Sun provided leadership to the discontented elements in Guangdong 1917-1918, why was Lu eventually able to remove him in May 1918? There seemed to be very little interest in Guangdong concerning the reorganization and the fact that Sun was stripped of his powers.³²⁸ Why? Why did the provincial elites, in particular, fail to support Sun, who was perhaps the most illustrious Guangdong figure of that period? Did they not want to reclaim the power lost to the Guangxi clique and put it back in the hands of Guangdong natives?

³²⁶ Beijing's policy was precisely to play the Southern factions one against another, and to give support to whichever faction that would acknowledge its authority.

³²⁷ For the argument that "factionalism" was responsible for China's problems during the Republican period, see A. Nathan's classic study, *Peking Politics*, esp. chp.2.

³²⁸ Unlike the time when Governor Zhu was forced to resign, there were no protests from the provincial assembly or civilian organizations. If the pro-merchant paper *Huazi ribao* is an accurate guide, then the reorganization indeed aroused little interest, because there was only minimal reporting on it.

To understand this problem, we must examine closely the relationship between the Sun and the Guangdong elites in this period. Despite the enthusiastic welcome they gave Sun when he arrived in Guangzhou 1917, the provincial elites were ambivalent toward Sun from the very beginning. While they respected Sun as a revolutionary hero of 1911 and were pleased to have him help them in their fight against Lu, they were also suspicious of his intentions. For instance, just when Sun was on his way to Guangzhou set up a rival government, an article in the *Guangdong qishierhang shangbao* pointedly remarked how powerful people were merely using Guangdong to further their own ambition rather than to help the country.³²⁹ Just when Sun was passionately speaking of a battle between "true republicanism" and "pseudo-republicanism", another article in the same newspaper mocked, perhaps not so coincidentally, the hypocrisy and the lack of genuine principles in the Republican political arena.³³⁰

Sun's behavior following the establishment of the military government in September 1917 did nothing to clear away this suspicion, but must have on the contrary confirmed the validity of the skepticism. As the Guangdong elites were quick to find out, if Lu Rongting and Chen Bingkun used all kinds of methods, legal and illegal, popular and unpopular, to increase revenue, so would Sun. As I have described, Sun proposed the legalization of more forms of gambling so as to draw revenue for his military government, although he must have known full well how unpopular this was. When Sun took over the provincial judiciary from the central

³²⁹ *Guangdong qishierhang shangbao*, July 11, 1917, p.3.

³³⁰ *Guangdong qishierhang shangbao*, July 14, 1917, p.3. See See M. Tsin, *The Cradle of Revolution: Politics and Society in Canton, 1900-1927*, pp.154-156.

government in early 1918, he took away all the litigation money deposited there and used it instead for military purposes, causing a temporary breakdown of the legal system.³³¹

Therefore, despite Sun's "Guangdong connection", the Guangdong elites must have found it increasingly hard to believe that Sun was in fact "one of them", and not just another politician exploiting Guangdong for his own interests. That was also why even Sun himself admitted that the Guangdong people were "cold" to him.³³² Indeed, if Lu Rongting and his associates seldom consulted the provincial assembly, Sun was hardly different. Sun did occasionally speak about the need to promote the welfare of Guangdong, but the Guangdong elites must have found the rhetoric too far divorced from reality.³³³ In fact, one may say that despite Sun's emphasis on the importance of local autonomy in his writings,³³⁴ in reality the province was for the nation, and not the other way round.³³⁵ For instance, Sun recruited pirates, bandits and outlaws into his army to strengthen his position, totally disregarding the consequences this might bring

³³¹ *Huazi ribao*, Feb. 19, 1918, p.2.

³³² Sun complained about the fact that while people in other provinces were giving him enthusiastic support, the "people and officials" in Guangdong had been cold to him. *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 4:290-292.

³³³ For instance, his speech made on Feb. 22, 1918 about the future economic development of Guangdong and China. Sun's plan was grand in vision, but lacked practical solutions to current provincial problems such as financial insolvency and banditry: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:344-347.

³³⁴ See P. Kuhn. "Local Self-Government Under the Republic: Problems of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization". *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, eds. F. Wakeman, C. Grant esp. pp.280-287

³³⁵ The fact that the province was primarily for the nation is very explicit in a letter of Zou Lu to Sun, Dec. 13, 1918. In this letter Zou talked about using Guangdong as a base because of its location and resources, and the steps needed to achieve it. Sun agreed with Zou. In this letter one can sense how Sun and his associates basically treated Guangdong as a province to exploit for their national revolution. *Geming wenxian* 48:291

to law and order in Guangdong.³³⁶ Even though the elites strongly protested against his actions, Sun simply would not stop.³³⁷ This lack of concern for the province was fully exposed in Sun's coup in January 1918, in which Sun directed the navy to bombard Governor Mo's office, causing considerable damage to the city in the process. The Guangdong elites were outraged, and opinions weighed so heavily against Sun that he had to meet with provincial leaders to explain his actions.³³⁸ So perhaps it was no surprise that the provincial elites did not come to Sun's rescue in May 1918. In the eyes of the Guangdong elites, Sun's Military government and his constitutional ideals were perhaps hardly more appealing than either Lu Rongting or the central government.³³⁹

³³⁶USDS 893.00/2835, Myers to Reinsch, April 10, 1918.

³³⁷SHA 679/32411 CCER, April 12, 1918. Sun did not stop his recruitment even after numerous protests.

³³⁸See Tang Ruixiang, "Sun Zhongshan ling junjian paoji yuedushu wenti qianxi", *Zhongshan daxue xuebao luncong: Sun Zhongshan yanjiu luncong*, vol.6 (1988). pp.101-109; Chen, *Nianpu changbian*, 1:1088-1091.

³³⁹The practice of using Guangdong, often ruthlessly, for the sake of the national revolution by Sun and other Guomindang leaders, was to continue in the 1920s and 1930s. See Tsin, *Cradle of Revolution*. Chp.3; J. Fitzgerald, "Increased Disunity: The Politics of Finance of Guangdong Separatism, 1926-1936", *Modern Asian Studies* 24, (1990:4), pp.745-775.

Chapter Four:

The Battle of Words: Public Perceptions of the Constitutional Crisis of 1917

In the preceding chapters we have examined the nature of the constitutional crisis in China in the summer of 1917, and how political players across the political spectrum, namely Duan Qirui, Sun Yatsen, the parliamentary members, and the Southern regional warlord Lu Rongting, viewed the crisis. But an important question which remains is: how did the Chinese public in general view those events? In asking this question I am aware of the inherent difficulty in providing a fool-proof solution to the problem. There was obviously no one "Chinese public", and it is nearly impossible to define it in precise terms.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is also obvious that certain sectors of the "public" were more important and politically more active than others. So in the following paragraphs, I will limit my discussion to the political opinions of what one may call the "informed" Chinese public. By this term I primarily refer to the educated elite in the urban areas; those who were politically conscious, and those who paid attention to the political developments of the country. Even though numerically they were clearly only a minority of the population, their influence clearly far exceeded their small numerical size might suggest, because they were usually politically the most vocal.

To understand their perceptions of the events, I have surveyed the key newspapers and journals published at that time, such as *Shibao*, *Shenbao* and

³⁴⁰In many ways, the difficulty of writing about public opinion was not unlike the difficulties faced by fellow historians who try to write the history of "mentalities" of previous generations. See P. Burke, *History and Social Theory*. pp.91-96.

Dongfang zazhi. The views expressed in these publications, admittedly, might not infallibly reflect their perceptions toward the constitutional crisis. But they, I believe, do provide us with a mosaic of what contemporaries thought about the crisis, and equally important, they at least shed light on what the key moulders of opinions in these publications at that time perceived the events.³⁴¹

Liang Qichao's Arguments

Regardless of whether or not there was indeed in China a so-called "public sphere" in this period, Republican politicians had by this time clearly recognized the importance of the opinion of the "informed" public.³⁴² It was certainly not coincidental that when Sun Yatsen arrived in Guangdong July 1917, the first thing he did was to meet with the press in Guangdong, explaining the aims of his *hufa* movement.³⁴³ This emphasis on public support and endearing oneself to the media is not surprising. It was generally agreed that the reason for Yuan Shikai's failure in his monarchical attempt in 1916, despite his military prowess, was that public opinion turned overwhelmingly against him. There was thus a growing belief in the power of

³⁴¹See E. May, *American Imperialism*. May's major contribution to the study of public ideas was that he identified the major moulders of opinion before America's participation in the Spanish-American War in 1898, and showed how they shaped the popular mind. It is much more difficult to say who were the main moulders of opinion were in China in the 1910s than America in the 1890s, but the writers I am quoting from in the following sections were without doubt very influential.

³⁴²There has been a great deal of debate in this area. See W. Rowe, "The Public Sphere in Modern China", *Modern China*, vol.16 No.3 (July 1990), pp.309-326. See the critiques by F. Wakeman, "The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate", *Modern China*, vol.19 no.2 (April 1993), pp.108-134; P. Kuhn, "Civil Society and Constitutional Development", presented in Ecole Francaise, Paris 1994.

³⁴³See his conversations with the press around 25 July 1917 and 31 July 1917 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:125-130.

"public opinion" in influencing political outcomes. Sun, for instance, put great emphasis on the force of public opinion, and said in one speech that one of the key reasons why his movement would ultimately succeed was that public opinion would be on his side. He confidently predicted that once the media helped him to convey his *hufa* message, public support would propel him to victory against Duan Qirui, although how exactly that would happen, as might be expected, was not clearly spelt out.³⁴⁴

On the other side of this battle over the constitution, Duan Qirui and his associates were equally aware of the importance of having public opinion on their side. The man in charge of promoting Duan's cause was none other than Liang Qichao, who had by this time effectively become the chief minister in the cabinet. Already in late Qing Liang had been famous for his writings which helped to shape public opinion and foster change.³⁴⁵ At that time Liang was of course the leading constitutionalist who argued for citizen participation within a framework of centralized government and national strength. The fact that Liang would now side with Duan might on the surface seem surprising. One reason for Liang's support for Duan was that Liang stood to benefit politically from cooperating with Duan. But perhaps more importantly, Liang knew that an alliance with Duan would give him the opportunity to become a key cabinet minister. He would thus have the chance to introduce the kind of reforms on government finances which he had longed for and which he felt were of cardinal importance to China's national strength. So while it might appear surprising that Liang would now work with a military general who aimed to restrict political participation,

³⁴⁴See his speech to the press on 31 July 1917, *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 4:128.

³⁴⁵See Li Xisuo et.al., *Liang Qichao zhuan*, chapters 8-10.

his behavior was probably still governed by the same goals he had earlier in his political career.³⁴⁶

Liang was given a difficult task. He already knew that Duan did not want to reconvene the parliament dissolved earlier in June, and he was now given the unenviable task of justifying this decision. To achieve this objective, Liang made very thorough preparations before he officially announced the government's plans. Soon after Duan crushed Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus, Liang began to openly discuss with political leaders and the press the need to resolve the constitutional problem at hand. Liang argued that the experience of 1916-1917 showed that there were serious problems in the constitutional system as it stood on the eve of Zhang's restoration, and hence there was an urgent need to reinvigorate the system. To Liang, there were three options which the country could take regarding the constitutional arrangement after Zhang Xun.³⁴⁷

First, China could simply recall the previous parliament and entrust it with the task of completing the permanent constitution. To Liang, however, this was an option fraught with pitfalls. As Liang sarcastically asked, if the parliament was only able to accomplish so little in 1916-1917 in the drafting process, why should one believe that it would do a better job if given a second chance now? Furthermore, arguing from a practical point of view, Liang said that the militarists in the provinces would surely oppose the reconvention of a parliament which they thought was rowdy and

³⁴⁶Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, pp.105-125.

³⁴⁷*Shenbao*, 22 July 1917, p.3.

unproductive in the previous year. So to recall this parliament, in Liang's view, would in fact be asking for trouble.

The second solution Liang proposed was to recall the 1916-1917 parliament, but at the same time reduce its size. Liang argued that the present parliament, with more than eight hundred members in the two houses, was too large for productive work. He believed that a smaller parliament might bring greater efficiency to the institution and hopefully less deadlock. What would be the standard used to decide who should remain as members and who should not? Here Liang was very ambiguous about it, but it is safe to assume that Liang wanted to weed out the radical elements of the parliament led by Sun Yatsen, whom he blamed for causing the problems in the 1916-1917 session. But again, Liang hinted that the process of deciding who should remain and who should not would be a cumbersome one, and that the country might need reforms which were more drastic.

The final option Liang suggested was the convention of a Provisional Senate, presumably modelled after the practice of the 1911 Revolution. Liang argued that since the 1916-1917 parliament had been legally dissolved by President Li Yuanhong in June 1917, there was no constitutional obligation to recall it. Furthermore, as Liang said, since Zhang Xun's *coup d'etat* had effectively ended the Republic and established another regime, the Republic as it stood after the coup should not be seen as a continuation of the previous Republic, but rather a new beginning.³⁴⁸ Therefore, in Liang's logic, it was perfectly acceptable to take 1911 as a legal precedent and convene

³⁴⁸This point was especially emphasized by Liang's close associate, Tang Hualong, in his interview with a Japanese newspaper: *Shenbao*, 25 July 1917, p.3.

a Provisional Senate as the revolutionaries did in 1911, for the purpose of discussing the political and constitutional issues of the day.³⁴⁹

Liang did not, at least superficially, show his preference when he initially threw out these ideas to the media and the public. In fact, he gave every appearance that it was to be an open discussion of the pros and cons of each and every proposal, and that the government would adopt a proposal which would reflect the wishes of the public.³⁵⁰ To further bolster this image of openness, Liang sent out telegrams soliciting the opinions of the regional military leaders on this matter, and asked whether the leaders would support the decision to convene a Provisional Senate.³⁵¹ Not surprisingly perhaps, the leaders overwhelmingly endorsed the government's proposal to call a Provisional Senate,³⁵² and by now some writers were already aware of the fact that the government had in fact made up its mind well beforehand.³⁵³ As it turned out, in a move which surprised no one, Liang soon announced that the government would not recall the previous parliament, but would instead convene a Provisional Senate to discuss possible constitutional changes.

³⁴⁹See how Liang and his Tang Hualong discussed these issues in *Shenbao* 23 July 1917, p.3; 25 July 1917, p.3.

³⁵⁰From all the reports about the discussions in the cabinet meetings, which were released to the press by Liang, the cabinet seemed to be totally undecided for a while as to what it should do. See for instance, *Shenbao*, 25 July 1917, p.6.

³⁵¹*Shibao*, 30 July 1917, p.2; 1 August, 1917, p.3.

³⁵²See *Shibao*, 6 August, 1917, p.2; 7 August, 1917, p.2.

³⁵³See *Shibao*, 7 August, 1917, p.2.

The Reaction of the Press

How did the press and the public react to Liang's plan? One may say that even though Liang had painstakingly explained his arguments to the press, there was little support for his proposal. In fact, most commentators believed that his proposal was unconstitutional. To say the Republic restored in mid-July by Duan Qirui was a new regime instead of a continuation of the old one was evidently an artificial argument, and even Liang and his associates realized that. Liang and his close associate, Tang Hualong, themselves conceded that from a strict constitutional point of view his arguments might not stand up. But they argued that the public should realize that desperate times called for desperate measures, and there was no reason why one must stick to a strict interpretation of the constitution. Their proposal of convening a Provisional Senate was, in their view, the best practical solution under the confines of the existing Provisional Constitution, although, as they admitted, it might not be the most constitutional one.³⁵⁴

Few political commentators, however, subscribed to Liang's view. The majority of them believed that the convention of a Provisional Senate would mean an open and blatant flouting of the Provisional Constitution, pure and simple. For instance, one writer in the prestigious Shanghai newspaper, *Shenbao*, argued that while superficially there might seem to be a legal precedent for such Liang's proposal, such a move was at heart clearly against the spirit of the Provisional Constitution. As he bitterly remarked, Liang was merely "taking certain clauses of the Provisional Constitution out of context" to suit his own political purposes. If Liang was allowed to

³⁵⁴*Shenbao*, 23 July 1917, p.3.

proceed with what he proposed, the reporter continued, the whole basis of constitutional rule would be undermined.³⁵⁵ Another writer argued that such a move would have deadly consequences, because it would create a bad precedent for future politicians who might copy this practice to "get rid of constitutional rule".³⁵⁶

Nevertheless, in denouncing Liang's plans for a Provisional Senate, many journalists actually did share Liang's frustrations toward the old parliament. The editor of *Shenbao*, for instance, conceded that there were "bad elements" in the old parliament,³⁵⁷ and another reporter thought that there was indeed the need to remove the radical elements of the Guomindang from the decision-making process.³⁵⁸ Yet in spite of this the majority of the writers condemned the decision to call a Provisional Senate as unconstitutional. As one of the reporters questioned Liang in an interview, even if the parliamentary institution was in need of reforms, there was no justification to break the constitution to achieve the above purpose.³⁵⁹ Another writer put it in even starker terms. The difference between recalling the parliament and convening a Provisional Senate was to him analogous to that between constitutional rule and autocratic rule, or true republicanism and pseudo-republicanism. It was argued that

³⁵⁵*Shenbao*, 30 July, 1917, p.7.

³⁵⁶*Shibao*, 31 July, 1917, p.2.

³⁵⁷*Shenbao*, 25 July, 1917, p.3.

³⁵⁸*Shibao*, 3 August, 1917, p.2.

³⁵⁹*Shenbao*, 25 July, 1917, p.3.

the failure to recall the old parliament would only mean the end of true constitutional rule for China.³⁶⁰

Even on the practical level Liang's arguments were being challenged. For instance, one columnist argued that while one could not know whether the parliament would be productive if recalled, one also had no recourse to know whether the Provisional Senate would be able to accomplish anything either. So if the old parliament might be unproductive again, how could one guarantee that the Provisional Senate would not be? How could one be sure that the Senate members would be more efficient in providing solutions to the constitutional problems of the day than the parliamentary members would be?³⁶¹

The Public's Dilemma

Yet if the media and the public were on the whole opposed to Liang's proposal, there seemed to be a sense of helplessness as to what they could do about it, and what other alternatives they had. When one surveys the major newspapers of the time, one will realize that not a single political commentator seriously considered the option of endorsing Sun Yatsen's *hufa* effort, even though most of them agreed that what Liang and Duan Qirui did was unconstitutional.³⁶² One major reason was probably the

³⁶⁰*Shibao*, 29 July, 1919, p.2. What is interesting is that the writer had borrowed the vocabularies as used by Sun Yatsen, which I have described in chapter two. But he stopped short of supporting Sun though.

³⁶¹*Shenbao*, 25 July, 1917, p.3.

³⁶²They included papers which were politically neutral, such as *Shibao*, *Shenbao*, *Wenhuibao*, *Changsha dagongbao*, *Qishierhang shangbao*, *Dongfang zazhi* and so on.

widespread fear of the possibility of a resumption of warfare. The editor of the *Shibao*, for instance, lamented that the country had already experienced substantial turmoil in the past years, and that any more civil war would deal a death blow to the nation. He believed that if the North and the South were to come to blows, the situation would become so chaotic that it would be "out of anyone's control".³⁶³

The lukewarm attitude toward Sun's rival government in the South was also the consequence of the lack of confidence on Sun's ability to win in his fight against Beijing. While Sun's own party newspaper, *Minguo ribao*, argued in a series of articles in August that the Southern provinces were in fact militarily stronger than the North, very few people bought this theory.³⁶⁴ The *Shibao*, in fact, explicitly said that the Southern provinces had no chance in any war with Beijing. It plainly stated that Sun's only hope was to use the threat of a rebellion to force Duan and Liang to compromise and recall the old parliament, because in its view, Sun could not possibly achieve his objectives on the battlefield.³⁶⁵

This lack of confidence in Sun in fact ran deeper. There was a clear distrust not only of Sun's ability to successfully pursue his cause, but also his intentions behind his cause. As I have already described in chapter three, the Guangdong population were deeply suspicious of Sun's motives behind the *hufa* movement, because they thought Sun was merely exploiting the province to serve his own political purposes. Such skepticism was in fact prevalent within the country as a whole, not just in

³⁶³ *Shenbao*, 26 July 1917, p.7.

³⁶⁴ See the articles in the issues in late August, 1917, *Minguo Ribao*.

³⁶⁵ *Shibao*, 3 August 1917, p.2.

Guangdong. For instance, while admitting that Liang and his associates were partly to blame for the problems of the parliament in 1916-1917, many political commentators also blamed the problems on what they saw as the reckless behavior of the Guomindang radicals. As one of them said, there was clearly a need to remove the violent elements of the Guomindang from the parliament for the institution to work in the future, even though he would not support the way Liang and Duan sought to accomplish that.³⁶⁶

This critical attitude toward Sun, I believe, must also be tied to the fact even though many commentators regarded Duan and Liang's actions as unconstitutional, they were equally unsure whether Sun's behavior was any better. As I have already shown in chapters two and three, the Guangdong populace were suspicious of Sun because they believed many of Sun's actions were equally dictatorial and unconstitutional. One commentator from *Shenbao* openly questioned the legality of the so-called "Extraordinary Parliament" in the South Sun convened, and remarked sarcastically that from now on everything could be called "extraordinary" by politicians.³⁶⁷ Other writers also doubted whether it was appropriate to use force to achieve one's purpose, even if it was for the cause of the constitution. As a columnist in the *Dongfang zazhi* pointed out, since every side logically saw itself as the only true protector of republicanism, so if everyone was to use force to bring about what he believed to be true republicanism, then it would only result in chronic civil war in the country. So in the his mind, rebellion was not the answer.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶*Shibao*, 3 August 1917, p.2.

³⁶⁷*Shenbao*, 7 August 1917, p.7.

³⁶⁸*Dongfang zazhi*, vol.14 no.9 (1917), pp.2-3.

A further reason why many writers felt that Sun's actions were too drastic was that they believed what the Chinese Republic needed was simply time to attain maturity. In this line of thought, true republicanism would come to China when the Chinese population became accustomed to the system, and there was no way one could speed up the process. As an influential commentator of *Dongfang zazhi* at that time, Gao Lao, pointed out, it was rather natural that the Chinese Republican system would face as many difficulties as it did. This was because when compared with Europe and America, China did not have a comparable industrial economy which Gao believed to be the prerequisite for a mature republican system. Furthermore, old habits and customs still lingered on in China after the 1911 Revolution, and the country's educational level had yet to reach a comparable level with the industrialized states of Europe and America. As he argued, it was in fact a good thing that China was facing such difficulties with republicanism, because it was only in times of difficulties that old habits could be washed away, and that people would become willing to change and adapt to a new environment.

If this was the case, what should be done to help republicanism take root in China? Gao argued that the only true solution to the problem was to start from the basics: promoting education, strengthening the economy, and reforming old habits and customs. Only when these objective conditions became ripe for republicanism could true republicanism emerge in China. In the meantime, politicians should learn to work with one another and compromise for the sake of the country.³⁶⁹ This was why in a thinly disguised rebuke of Sun Yatsen, Gao criticized those politicians who tried to

³⁶⁹*Dongfang zazhi*, vol.14 no.8 (1917), pp.1-5.

attain true republicanism at one stroke by force, because he believed this would in the end only hurt the country's interests. In fact, a fellow columnist of Gao went so far as to say that anyone who wanted to use force to bring about his version of true republicanism was committing a crime against the Republic.³⁷⁰

Here we can see Sun's problem vividly. Even though Liang had probably lost the battle of words in that he failed to convince the media and public opinion that his decision to call a Provisional Senate was constitutional, Sun did not come out of the battle victorious either. Indeed, we may say that the press kept its neutrality throughout the process, and did not support either side. Perhaps to the media and the public it was a choice between two evils: either it was Duan and Liang who were clearly bending, if not breaking, the constitution, or Sun, whose actions were equally dubious. What the public urged was therefore a compromise between the two sides, something which they would not get until late 1918.

The Implications of Public Neutrality

This neutrality, however, hurt Sun more deeply than it hurt Duan. As long as public opinion was not overwhelmingly against the government as it was during Yuan Shikai's monarchical attempt in 1916, Duan remained confident that he would be in a commanding position, because militarily he was just so much more powerful than Sun was. He knew the foreign powers would still support him, and he knew he could count on the vast financial resources of the Beijing government. Sun, on the other

³⁷⁰Dongfang Zazhi, vol.14 no.9 (1917), p.4.

hand, had counted on public opinion in his *hufa* struggle, and even he himself admitted that it was one of the few weapons he possessed. Without the overwhelming support which Sun had hoped for, Sun knew there was no way he could persuade the foreign powers to turn their support to him. Sun's failure to command such anticipated support was, indeed, one of the key reasons why his movement would run out of steam so quickly in 1918.

The ambivalent attitude shown by the public toward either side demonstrated that if in retrospect we historians tend to look at the constitutional struggle and the subsequent *hufa* movement in 1917 in black-and-white terms,³⁷¹ it was not nearly as black-and-white to contemporaries at all. While contemporaries realized that there were serious problems in the constitutional system as it stood, there was yet to be a consensus as what the alternatives were. The public was clearly not prepared to sacrifice unity even for the sake of the constitution.³⁷² There was, in addition, the widespread fear that prolonged political conflict might endanger national survival. No wonder Sun's policy of military confrontation was so poorly received, even though he might be fighting for a good cause.

This was also why right from the beginning of the crisis the public had looked for a middleground between Duan and Sun. The opportunity for compromise came about, however, only when both the North and the South realized that they were not able to achieve a decisive victory in the summer of 1918, and when a seasoned politician named Xu Shichang came to the forefront. In the second half of the thesis, I

³⁷¹See for instance, the typical account in Mo, *Hufa*.

³⁷²See for instance, *Dongfang zaishi*, vol.14 no.9 (1917), p.4.

will analyze how Xu tried to bring the country back together, and how he manipulated public opinion to help his effort to bring about a grand compromise between the North and the South.

Part Two

Chapter Five:

The Politics of Civilian Rule: Xu Shichang and His Rise to the Presidency, 1918

On 10 October 1918, Xu Shichang took over as the fourth president of the Republic of China. This was a rather surprising conclusion to the events in the months before, in which two major military generals, Premier Duan Qirui and President Feng Guozhang, fought bitterly for power for ten long months. Not only did both Duan and Feng agree to step down, but Xu, a mere civilian politician who had never commanded an army in his life, would now hold the highest office in the country. What is even more remarkable is that while many commentators thought that Xu would only become a mere rubber-stamp in the government, Xu was to prove them all wrong. Xu soon managed to appoint his protege, Qian Nengxun, as the new premier, and step-by-step he placed his associates in key positions of the government. Furthermore, Xu even started to conduct peace negotiations with the Southern government in Guangzhou, a policy vehemently opposed by the military establishment. Why was Xu able to do what he did? Why was a civilian like Xu able to compete successfully for power with military heavy-weights like Duan Qirui and Feng Guozhang?

Xu's success did not fit well with our conventional understanding toward how early Chinese Republican politics worked. Central to the established view is the argument that the early Republican period was a time of "warlord" politics, in which military generals, thanks to their large armies, were able to dominate the political arena

and the decision-making process in the government.³⁷³ But if the early Republican period was indeed a time of the "power of the gun",³⁷⁴ why was Xu able to emerge as *the* dominant political figure in the late 1910s?

My task in this article is precisely to explain this paradox. My first goal is to describe who Xu Shichang was, and what role he played in late Qing and early Republican politics before 1918. I will seek to explain why he was able to get himself elected as the president by the Northern parliament in September 1918, when the latter was in fact by and large controlled by Duan Qirui. I will, furthermore, explain why despite the lack of an army, Xu was still able to fight successfully with the military, and how Xu prepared himself to resolve the constitutional questions of the day. In the end, I hope to use all this to help us to rethink the applicability of the so-called "warlord" model to early republican politics, and the weapons civilian politicians used in their fight against the military in the political arena.

Who was Xu Shichang?

Xu Shichang was born in 1855 in Henan province. Xu's grandfather was a minor official in the province, and his father had fought in battles against the Taipings.³⁷⁵ Xu's father died early, and Xu was raised by his mother and grandfather.

³⁷³The fact that the period is often called the "warlord period" speaks for itself. H.S. Ch'i, for instance, writes that the Chinese cabinet at that time "was the most pliable administrative tool used by the militarists to impose their will upon the Chinese people". Ch'i, *Warlord Politics*, p.2.

³⁷⁴I am borrowing the title from E. McCord's recent book, *The Power of the Gun*.

³⁷⁵Zhang Daxiang, "Wuo suo zhidao de Xu Shichang", *Wenshi ziliao* 48:216-217. Zhang's grandfather, Zhang Zhiwan, was a teacher of Xu Shichang, and Xu lived in Zhang Zhiwan's house for quite a while

We know around 1878 Xu became friends with the son of a local gentleman, who was, as fate would have it, none other than Yuan Shikai.³⁷⁶ In many ways, Xu, a few years Yuan's senior, could not be more different from Yuan. While Xu was studious and hard-working, Yuan had a reputation of drinking profusely and paying little attention to his studies.³⁷⁷ But rather improbably they soon became very good friends, and Yuan even paid for Xu's trip to Beijing sit for the metropolitan examination.³⁷⁸

Xu did not disappoint Yuan, and in 1886 he got the prestigious *jinshi* degree in his second attempt, at the age of thirty-two. By this time Yuan had already gone to Korea though, having become the resident-general of the Chinese government over there. Xu's career, however, did not immediately flourish after his examination success. Because he managed only average scores among all *jinshi*-holders in the palace examination, he was only appointed a fellow, not a compiler, at the Hanlin Academy. In the next ten years Xu failed to make much headway in the bureaucratic ranks. In the Hanlin Academy, scholars were classified into the red and the black groups, and it was to the inferior black groups that Xu belonged. As a result, while in

when Xu was in the Hanlin Academy. See also He Peixin ed., "Xu Shichang nianpu: part one", *Jindaishi ziliao*, no.69 (1988), pp.1-3. He has access to the family archives of Xu, and much of the account is based on Xu's diaries. For more information, read Chen Sanli ed., *Sanyuanjing wenji*, for the obituary of Xu's brother, which contains information on Xu's youth as well.

³⁷⁶Yuan was the grandson of the elder brother of the famous general Yuan Jiasan, who fought many successful campiagns against the Taipings: see A. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, p.950.

³⁷⁷It is said that Yuan once lost so much money in gambling that he had to borrow Xu's clothes: Zhao Lan, "Xu Shichang he Yuan Shikai de lishi pianduan", *Hebei wenshi ziliao*, 2:173.

³⁷⁸See Shen Zuxian et.al. eds.. "Rongan diziji (1913)", in *Beiyang junfa* ed. Lai Xinxia, 5:7-8.

name Xu's position carried with it great prestige, in fact he had few responsibilities and even less power in government.³⁷⁹

It was again Yuan Shikai who was to help Xu to turn around his career. In the wake of China's disastrous defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Yuan was transferred back to China, and was appointed the head of the Newly Created Army³⁸⁰ based in a place called Xiaozhan near Tianjin. Yuan soon invited Xu to join him as the chief civilian advisor of the Army.³⁸¹ Yuan offered this post to Xu not only because Xu was an old friend, but probably also because Xu had just helped him deflect some vicious criticisms from court officials. In 1896, a censor memorialized to the throne that Yuan had been arrogant and dictatorial in Xiaozhan, and recommended that Yuan be dismissed from office. It was only because Xu was on good terms with one of the officials sent to investigate Yuan that Yuan was cleared of any wrongdoing.³⁸²

We know that Xu eventually accepted Yuan's invitation, but it must have been a very difficult decision for Xu to make. It is true that the financial rewards for working in the Hanlin Academy were minimal, especially for someone like Xu who had been placed in the "black" category. It is also true that working for Yuan would

³⁷⁹L. Merchant, *The Mandarin President: Xu Shichang and the Militarization of Chinese Politics*, pp.24-27. Another reason why Xu was disliked was that his superiors, including the famous Weng Tonghe, preferred scholars to be all-rounded and well-versed in all fields, but Xu was a person who specialized in a few areas like calligraphy. See Woxiu Zhongzi, *Dangdai mingren xiaozhuan*, 1:13.

³⁸⁰This is to be differentiated from the New Armies created in the early 1900s.

³⁸¹Guo Jianlin et.al., *Hanlin zongtong Xu Shichang*, p.22.

³⁸²Guo, *Xu Shichang*, pp.23-24. That official was Chen Kuilong: Chen Kuilong "Mengjiaoting zaji" *Jindai baihai*, 1:373.

give Xu far more *actual* responsibilities and consequently far more power. Yet leaving Beijing and the prestigious Hanlin Academy must have felt like an admission of defeat on Xu's part. If Xu had indeed wanted to find a post with better financial rewards and more responsibilities, he could probably have easily found one in the provinces in the years before, given the fact that he was a *jinshi* degree-holder. The fact that Xu stayed in Beijing for ten long years despite the harsh circumstances shows that Xu was a person with considerable career ambitions.³⁸³ Xu probably aimed to make it to the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, and he knew he had a much better chance of accomplishing this goal if he stayed in Beijing than if he were to go to the provinces.³⁸⁴

But this move to Xiaozhan would turn out to be an important step in Xu's rise to power in the late Qing and the early Republic. It helped Xu in a variety of ways. Firstly, it put him in charge of soldiers in the Newly Created Army who were to become important figures in the early Republican period. They included Duan Qirui, who would become the premier and the preeminent military general after Yuan Shikai's death. They also included Zhang Xun, a powerful military commander in Anhui in the early Republic who would attempt to restore the Manchus in 1917. In fact, Xu liked the young Zhang Xun so much that he formally took Zhang as his pupil. There was Li Chun as well, who was to become the military governor of Jiangsu in the

³⁸³Xu actually still retained in name the membership of the Hanlin Academy. Xu did once entertain the idea of going to the provinces, but his uncle in the end persuaded him not to, arguing that he would have better career prospects in the capital: Zhang, "Wuo suo", p.218; Guo, *Xu Shichang*, pp.21-22.

³⁸⁴Xu actually once said that he would be satisfied with being a mere provincial official, although judging from his subsequent actions this did not seem to be true: Woxiu Zhongzhi, *Dangdai mingren xiaozhuan* 1:13.

late 1910s.³⁸⁵ Furthermore, serving in Yuan's army helped Xu to transform himself into more than a mere civilian bureaucrat. While unlike Li Hongzhang or Zeng Guofan, Xu had never commanded an army all his life, Xu's tenure at Xiaozhan helped him to become well-versed in military affairs in the Li-Zeng tradition. It was during his tenure at Xiaozhan that Xu took time to do research on military topics, and he in fact wrote several treatises discussing military strategies and drilling methods.³⁸⁶

Most importantly, Xiaozhan helped Xu to further strengthen his ties with Yuan Shikai. We know that Yuan now referred to Xu as his "elder brother", and Yuan wrote him frequent and extensive letters whenever Xu was away, discussing issues great and small.³⁸⁷ Xu had, indeed, become Yuan's most trusted advisor. During the Hundred Days Reform in 1898, when a key supporter of Kang Youwei went to Xiaozhan seek Yuan's support, it was Xu who was given the important responsibility of dealing with such a delicate matter. Wisely Xu gave an evasive answer to Kang's supporter, and refused to get Yuan involved.³⁸⁸

The rise of Yuan after the Boxer Uprising in 1900 served to propel Xu into prominence together with Yuan. Immediately after Yuan took over as the governor-general of Zhili in 1901, he recommended Xu to the Empress Dowager. The Dowager

³⁸⁵Guo, *Xu Shichang*, pp.22-23.

³⁸⁶Xu's works included *A Detailed Pictorial Explanation of the Drilling Methods of the Newly Built Army*, *The Military Strategies of the Newly Built Army*, and so on. See He, "Nianpu: part one", pp.19-21; see also Guo Jianlin, *Xu Shichang yu xiaozhanlianbing*, unpublished manuscript. I want to thank Professor Guo of Nankai University (Tianjin, China) for allowing me access to this unpublished work of his.

³⁸⁷See Yuan's letters to Xu in their archival form in Chen Ruifang et.al. eds., *Beiyang junfa shiliao: Yuan Shikai juan*, 1:289-312.

³⁸⁸Guo, *Xu Shichang*, p.31.

interviewed Xu in the palace, and was apparently highly impressed by Xu's analytical abilities.³⁸⁹ In the next few years, Xu climbed rapidly in the Qing bureaucracy. In 1905, he was admitted to the Grand Council. Later in the same year, he became the President of the Board of Police.

In late 1906, Xu, together with Prince Zaizhen, were made co-leaders of an investigative tour of the three Manchurian provinces, with the purpose of reforming and strengthening those provinces in face of Russian and Japanese penetration. When they returned, they submitted memorials recommending wholesale reforms, and implied that if things were not to be done quickly, the dynasty would run the danger of losing the provinces altogether.³⁹⁰ One of Xu's key recommendations was to unify the three provinces and put them under a governor-general who would assume overall control. This person, Xu argued, should have complete control of all matters, civil and military, within the three provinces, and only in foreign affairs should he need to consult with the Board of Foreign Affairs in Beijing. It was only with this kind of centralization of power, Xu argued, could serious reforms be carried out.³⁹¹

Xu's recommendations were very important, because it turned out that the Qing court would not only accept them wholesale, but would also appoint Xu as the very first governor-general of the three provinces. By this time Xu had become a political heavyweight in his own right. According to Zhang Yilin, who was a close associate of Yuan Shikai, Yuan was interested in the position himself, because he realized the

³⁸⁹Woxiu, *Xiaozhuan*, 1:13-14.

³⁹⁰Xu Shichang, *Tuigengtang zhengshu* (1917), reprinted as *Jindai zhongguo shiliao congkan* (225) ed. Shen Yunlong, volume one pp.213-362 for the first memorial, pp.363-376 for this second one.

³⁹¹Found in his second memorial: Xu, *Tuigeng*, volume one, pp.371-372.

power this office carried. When Yuan learnt that the court was about to appoint Xu to the post, he actually tried in vain to persuade the court to appoint him instead.³⁹² It is difficult to know whether the Qing court was deliberately playing Yuan and Xu against each other, but what was clear was that Xu's prominence was no longer solely due to Yuan's patronage.

Xu's tenure in Manchuria was of great importance to his political career, because it was in this period that he cultivated his extensive connections which would prove so useful in the early Republican period. Already before the appointment Xu was building a core group of loyal supporters for himself, many of whom were to become very prominent politicians after 1911. This group included people like Zhu Qiqian (1872-1962), who was to become Minister of Communications and then Minister of the Interior in the early Republic, and who was to be entrusted by Xu as the chief delegate of the Beijing government in the Shanghai Peace Conference in 1919; Qian Nengxun (1869-1924), who became Minister of the Interior under Duan Qirui in 1917, and who was to be Xu's premier when Xu became president in 1918; Wu Jisun (1874-?), who was to be Xu's private secretary when Xu became president. All of them owed their budding career to Xu's patronage, and they followed Xu to Manchuria serve in various important capacities.³⁹³

The governor-generalship gave Xu a further opportunity of dispensing new favors and extending his network. For instance, when the Beijing government asked

³⁹²Zhang Yilin, *Xin taipingshi ji*, juan 8:39b.

³⁹³Zhu became the Director of the Bureau for Mongolian Affairs in Manchuria. Xu, *Cidian*, p.200. Qian was to serve in various capacities in Manchuria, including being the prefect of Shuntian: Xu, *Cidian*, p.1530. Wu was to serve in various secretarial capacities in Xu's administration: Xu, *Cidian*, p.357

Xu to recommend talented people for promotion in late 1907, Xu put forward the names of fifteen junior officials, and nearly all of them were to eventually become important figures in the early Republican political scene. They included Lu Zongyu (1876-1941), Cao Rulin (1877-1966), Tan Yenkai (1879-1930), Zhang Zongxiang (1879-1962), and so on, to name but a few.³⁹⁴ This was not all. Many of the "warlords" in the Republican period actually served as Xu's subordinates in Manchuria as well, and this was also why many of them would see Xu as their elder statesman in the 1910s and 1920s. For instance, Cao Kun (1862-1938), who was to be the military governor of Zhili and the fifth president of the Republic, was at this time a military commander at Changchun. Zhang Zuolin (1875-1928), the infamous warlord of Manchuria in the 1910s and 1920s, was at this time a junior commander at Fengtian. Wu Peifu (1874-1939), who was to be a dominant military figure in the early 1920s, was also a junior officer in Fengtian. This list could go on.

One would expect the fall of Yuan Shikai after the death of the Empress Dowager in late 1908 to hurt Xu's position as well, but this surprisingly did not happen. It is true that Xu soon resigned from his post in Manchuria, and was transferred back to Beijing become the President of the Board of Postal Service and Communications, yet Xu's influence within the court in fact did not wane with Yuan's downfall.³⁹⁵ When the court announced the establishment of a cabinet in preparation

³⁹⁴Lu Zongyu was to be a senator, Director of the Currency Bureau, and Chinese ambassador to Japan in the Chinese Republic: Xu, *Cidian*, pp. 989-990. Cao Rulin was to be the leader of the New Communications Clique, and was to serve at various times as Minister of Communications, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs: Xu, *Cidian*, pp. 809-810. Tan Yenkai was to serve as the military and civil governor of Hunan in the early Republic: Xu, *Cidian*, p.1644. Zhang Zongxiang was to serve at various points as Minister of Justice, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, and Chinese Plenipotentiary in Japan: Xu, *Cidian*, pp.864-865.

³⁹⁵In the short run, perhaps Xu suffered, as court officials began to attack him after the fall of Yuan: See Merchant, *Xu Shichang*, pp.116-117. But in the long run Xu's position did not suffer at all.

of constitutional government in May 1911, Xu was one of only four Han Chinese cabinet ministers named. Xu was, in fact, even appointed as one of the vice-premiers.³⁹⁶ Perhaps this was not as much because the Manchu court genuinely trusted Xu than because they recognized they could not afford to push Xu and Yuan Shikai aside at the same time. In the wake of the 1911 Revolution, the court tried to persuade Yuan Shikai to come out of retirement, and Xu became its go-between person.³⁹⁷ In the end, it was again Xu who helped secure for Emperor Puyi generous terms for his abdication.³⁹⁸

To show his loyalty to the Qing dynasty, Xu went into temporary retirement after 1912. But Xu continued to be a potent force in politics. In 1914, Yuan Shikai coaxed Xu out of retirement and appointed him as the premier. Xu's political clout was vividly reflected by the fact that even though Xu was unwilling to back Yuan's monarchical ambitions, Yuan still repeatedly lavished great honors on Xu.³⁹⁹ With the death of Yuan, it was Xu who persuaded Premier Duan Qirui to support Li Yuanhong, the former vice-president, to succeed as president.⁴⁰⁰ In the turbulent years of 1917-1918 which I have described in earlier chapters, Xu many times served as mediators among disputing parties, and often with considerable success.

³⁹⁶Shen Yunlong, *Xu Shichang pingzhuan*, p.132.

³⁹⁷Merchant, *Xu Shichang*, pp.136-137.

³⁹⁸See Shen, *Pingzhuan*, p.177; Guo, *Xu Shichang*, pp.71-72.

³⁹⁹He Peixin ed., "Xu Shichang nianpu: part two", *Jindaishi ziliao*, no.70 (1988), pp.22-23. Xu predicted in his diaries that Yuan's attempt would only bring chaos. See also Zhang, "Wuo suo", p.228.

⁴⁰⁰Zhang, "Jindaishi pianduan", p.165. Zhang was an insider to the events.

The 1917-1918 Crisis

But what enabled Xu to become president in 1918? To understand this, one has to go back to July 1917 when, as I have described in earlier chapters, Duan Qirui successfully quashed Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus. Duan's subsequent refusal to reconvene the parliament led to the establishment of a rival government in Guangzhou and the declaration of independence of Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. Duan's actions were to have serious implications, not only because they were to result in months of civil war between the North and the South, but also because they were to result in the fragmentation of the so-called "Beiyang Clique".⁴⁰¹ Even though conventionally historians have argued that the death of Yuan Shikai marked the disintegration of the Clique, the fact was that the Northern military generals were very still very unified before July 1917, and it was from late 1917 onward that tensions began to surface.⁴⁰² The heart of the problem was the failure of the generals to agree on the best strategy to deal with the rebelling provinces.

On the one side, there was Duan Qirui, who believed that the Southern provinces should be forcefully subdued at all cost. One should, however, be aware of the fact that Duan did not, contrary to popular belief, advocate a war policy from the very beginning. In fact, as late as early October, 1917, Duan was still telling his generals that their forces should not attack until further instructions, because there was

⁴⁰¹In Chinese, either *Beiyang junfa* or *Beiyang jituan*, including basically all military generals in the north, and most of them owed their positions to the patronage of Yuan Shikai.

⁴⁰²For the conventional view, see Lary, "Warlord Studies", pp.441-443; Ch'i, *Warlord*, pp.15-16. But in fact during 1916-1917 the military generals were rather united, especially because they had a common enemy in Li Yuanhong and the Guomindang: see chapter one.

yet a chance that negotiations with the South would succeed.⁴⁰³ But when negotiations finally broke down, Duan lost his patience and instructed his officers to attack Hunan in mid-October.⁴⁰⁴ Duan was to become a staunch supporter of the war policy against the South, and would refuse to entertain the possibility of compromise from then on.

On the other side, there was Feng Guozhang, who became president after Li Yuanhong resigned in July 1917. From the beginning Feng was hesitant to use force against the Southern provinces. When Duan asked him to issue an order for the dismissal of the Southern military general Lu Rongting in late October, Feng took a very ambivalent position, and in fact tried to delay the order as much as he could.⁴⁰⁵ His protege, Li Chun, the military governor of Jiangsu, was even more vocal in his opposition against the war policy.⁴⁰⁶ Throughout the period of 1917-1918, Li openly clamored for peace negotiations, and was apparently in constant contact with Southern leaders, causing outrage in Duan's camp.⁴⁰⁷ The debate about war and peace was fast

⁴⁰³ SHA 1011/1440 The remarks of Duan on the telegram from Mo Qingyu on 5 October 1917. Mo was a commander in Shantou, and was about to rebel against Guangdong and join effort with Beijing. Mo reported that the situation was ripe for an attack on Guangzhou, but Duan said that since his negotiations with the Southern leaders (presumably with Lu Rongting and Chen Bingkun) had not broken down, he wanted Mo to wait.

⁴⁰⁴ On 14 October 1917, the Southern military leader, Chen Bingkun, issued a telegram demanding the dismissal of Duan, thus officially marking the beginning of the civil war.

⁴⁰⁵ Tao, *Beiyang*, 2:694.

⁴⁰⁶ Li and two other military governors along the Yangzi Valley sent a cable in late October demanding peace. Tao: *Beiyang*, 2:694.

⁴⁰⁷ It was no coincidence that Xu Shucheng would see Li Chun as his enemy number one: See Xu's telegram to the military governors on 1 February 1918 in *Zhongguo kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jindaishi bianjizu* ed. *Xu Shucheng diangao*, p.10 (no.19). Li's actions aroused suspicions as to whether he was actually loyal to the North's interests. See his various telegrams defending himself in "Taiohe nanbei zhanzheng", *Yijiujijiujinbei yihe ziliao*, ed. *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo*, pp.77-88.

becoming entwined, if not outright equated, with the personal rivalries between Duan and Feng.⁴⁰⁸

The period from October 1917 to Xu's inauguration as president can indeed be characterized as a time of escalating factional rivalries between the two camps. The first major event was the surprising defeat of the Northern armies in Changsha mid-November 1917. This resulted in Duan's resignation from the premiership, and severely damaged Duan's predominant position within the government and the military. It made the contest between Duan and Feng more even, and Feng was now making little disguises for his quest for power.⁴⁰⁹ For instance, it was reported that Feng deliberately dismissed all personnel in the administration who had worked for Duan, and replaced them wholesale with Duan's rivals.⁴¹⁰

It was Duan's supporters, however, who were to further open up the rift, and much of the blame must be put on Duan's trusted associate, Xu Shucheng (to be differentiated from the subject of this chapter, Xu Shichang). In an earlier chapter I have already described how Xu's arrogant attitude toward President Li Yuanhong in late 1916 damaged the relationship between Duan and Li. Although Duan was forced to dismiss Xu in November 1916 in order to accommodate to the wishes of Li's party, Duan reappointed Xu as cabinet secretary immediately after his victory over Zhang Xun in July 1917. Xu was completely vindicated, and now enjoyed the whole-hearted

⁴⁰⁸This was indeed the view of Zeng Yujun, the private secretary of Duan Qirui; see Zeng, "Huanhai", pp. 35-36.

⁴⁰⁹For a good concise narrative, see Li, *The Political History*, pp. 378-383.

⁴¹⁰See the report of Duan's secret agent, Ma Fengchi, after Duan resigned from the premiership, "Ma Fengchi", pp.50-51.

support of Duan. And because Duan was not a person who was interested in the day-to-day administration of government affairs, Xu soon became the primary spokesman for Duan and his war policy.⁴¹¹

This was to have serious implications, because in order to achieve his objectives, Xu would stop at nothing. This was already evident in January 1918 , when with the help of Zhang Zuolin, Xu forcefully seized a shipment of armaments purchased by the Beijing government under Feng's orders, because Xu felt that such armaments would serve to strengthen Feng's military power. Duan himself was actually stunned by how reckless Xu's actions were, because what Xu did *in effect* amounted to a rebellion against the Beijing government.⁴¹² This was only the beginning, because Xu soon began to further strengthen his ties with the ambitious Zhang. Xu's intention was to use Zhang's troops to intimidate Feng as well as to strengthen the war effort against the South. In the short run Xu was very successful. Duan reclaimed the premiership in March, and the war effort was resumed with added rigor. In the long run, however, Xu's actions served to confirm the perception that Xu would do anything to further his interests and those of his faction. Xu's "terrorist-like" activities were to continue. In June 1918, Xu shot dead a senior member of the "Beiyang Clique", Lu Jianzhang, in cold blood, simply because Lu had been clamoring for peace and had been on friendly terms with Feng.⁴¹³ In August and September

⁴¹¹Duan was generally regarded by those who knew him as a rather lazy administrator: Zeng, "Huanhai", p.28.

⁴¹²Zeng, "Huanhai", p.37; Zhang, "Neige", pp.197-198.

⁴¹³Zhang, "Jindaishi pianduan", pp.167-169.

1918, Xu and Zhang's troops were sent to the vicinity of Shanghai, with the clear intention of intimidating Li Chun, the pro-peace governor-general of Jiangsu.⁴¹⁴

The recklessness of Xu hurt Duan badly, even though this might not be immediately apparent. Xu's actions not only deeply undermined Duan's moral authority and his claim as the preeminent military leader, but they also further accelerated the disintegration of the Beiyang Clique. This trend was reflected by the incident in which two of the major commanders of the Northern army, Cao Kun and Wu Peifu, refused to continue their war effort in April 1918.⁴¹⁵ Wu Peifu, in fact, soon negotiated an armistice with the Southern leaders without prior permission from his superiors.⁴¹⁶ He criticized the war policy openly, and launched a thinly-veiled attack against Duan.⁴¹⁷ That a junior commander like Wu would so openly and so critically attack the predominant military leader was something unheard of until now. Thus the political arena in the summer of 1918 was clouded with uncertainties. On the one side, Duan and Xu Shucheng wanted war at all cost. On the other Feng and his allies were quietly sabotaging the war effort, and their actions were supported by commanders like Wu Peifu. On top of all this was the fact that both parliamentary and presidential elections were coming up in the summer and early autumn. So would

⁴¹⁴USDS 893.00/2902, S. Sokobin (Vice-Consul in charge at Nanjing) to J.V.A. MacMurray, Charge d'Affaires, ad interim, Beijing, 25 September 1918.

⁴¹⁵Cao Kun, Wu Peifu and Li Chun etc. were often said to be members of the "Zhili Clique", with Feng Guozhang as the elder leader: see Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.232-239; Ch'i, *Warlord*, pp.68-76. Yet it was clear at least in 1918 many of the members acted very independently. Feng had little control over Cao, neither Feng nor Cao had much control over Wu Peifu. The only two who acted together were Feng and Li.

⁴¹⁶See Danganguan, *Hufa*, pp.951-953.

⁴¹⁷Danganguan, *Hufa*, pp.955-956 for Wu's public response to Duan Qirui's plea for the resumption of war, 28 August 1918.

there be war, or would there be peace? Would Duan remain in control, or would Feng reassert his position?

The Opportunity Presents Itself

In the summer of 1918, parliamentary elections, based on the new electoral laws devised by the Provisional Senate in early 1918, were held throughout the country, excepting the Southern provinces. Thanks to their control of the government and its vast resources, and thanks to their newly-established electoral machinery, the Anfu Club, Duan and Xu Shucheng scored a sweeping victory against their opponents.⁴¹⁸ Feng had hoped to get himself re-elected, but Duan's victory effectively squashed his hopes.⁴¹⁹ Duan now controlled about seventy percent of the seats in both houses, with the rest being won by the Old Communications Clique headed by Liang Shiyi, the Research Clique headed by Liang Qichao and Xiong Xiling, and various other political factions.⁴²⁰

Such results would seem to confirm Duan's preeminent position both within the government and the military in the summer of 1918. But did they? It is true that the landslide victory now gave Duan the choice of taking any political office he wanted, but the problem was that the issue of war with the South still remained unresolved, and that his enemies, though falling by the wayside in the elections, were

⁴¹⁸See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.92-103.

⁴¹⁹USDS 893.00/2867 Reinsch to Secretary of State, 17 June 1918.

⁴²⁰See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.103-104.

still potent enough to cause him serious trouble. First and foremost was the fact that many of his generals were still reluctant to continue the war effort. Duan could naturally stay as premier with the electoral victory, or replace Feng and become president himself, but he knew he would only face growing opposition if he tried too hard to marginalize his enemies. Feng, for one, had already remarked bitterly after his defeat that he would do anything he could to cause Duan trouble.⁴²¹ So if Duan was to take over as president, or remain as premier and replace Feng with his own favorites, he knew he would simply be adding fuel to the opposition's fire.⁴²²

Perhaps it is in this context that one can understand why after winning the elections so convincingly, Duan's party would suddenly become enthusiastic about electing Xu Shichang as president. The fact that Xu was at this time the clear-cut elder statesman in the Beiyang Clique was beyond question.⁴²³ To elect Xu as president would help Duan deflect accusations that he was power-mongering and dictatorial. It would also help Duan to smoothen his relations with Feng Guozhang, making it easier for Feng to accept the fact he had to step down from the presidency. Xu would serve Duan's purpose well, because Feng respected Xu's status as the elder statesman, and because Feng appreciated the fact Xu had stayed neutral throughout his feud with Duan.

⁴²¹Zhang, "Neige", p.202; *Shibao*, 31 July 1918, p.2.

⁴²²Cen Xuelu ed., *Sansui Liang yansun xiasheng nianpu*, 1:431.

⁴²³The respect Xu enjoyed, however superficial, was vividly reflected by the deferential attitude Cao Kun took when Xu visited him in late 1916. Cao was treating Xu as if Xu were his teacher: see Zhang, "Wuo suo", p.228.

In any case, Duan probably believed that yielding the presidency was not that great a price to pay anyway. Duan probably expected Xu's election to mean little in terms of *real* political impact. Granted that Xu's attitude toward using force against the South was ambivalent at best, but Duan had few reasons to expect Xu be capable of reversing his war policy even if Xu wanted to. After all, if Feng was not able to stop his war policy, why should Xu be able to?⁴²⁴ Furthermore, even though Duan decided not to seek the presidency, he still intended to stay on as the premier and the chairman of the powerful War Participation Bureau. There remained, to be sure, the problem regarding the reluctance of his military generals to resume the war effort. But Duan had already decided to use the vice-presidency as a prize to lure them back to war, and he was confident that there would be eager bidders to his offer.⁴²⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that Xu would rather suddenly become Duan's first choice for the presidency. In late August 1918 a military conference was held in Tianjin, and in accordance with Duan's wishes, the military generals nearly unanimously supported Xu's election. In early September, Xu was formally elected by the parliament as president, and on 10 October 1918, Xu became the first civilian president in Chinese Republican history.

Xu Shichang Strengthens his Position

Xu might in many ways be the fortunate beneficiary of the power struggle between Duan and Feng, but he was by no means a passive recipient of such good

⁴²⁴See *Shibao* 3 August, 1918, p.2.

⁴²⁵See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.120-124.

fortune. The fact is that long before his election, Xu had already taken steps to strengthen his political position and prepare himself for such opportunity. The sudden emergence of Xu Shichang in the summer of 1918 was actually preceded by a year of inactivity on Xu's part. In the months after Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus, Xu took a very low profile in political life. He spent most of his time in his estate in Henan, writing poetry, meeting friends and taking care of his gardens.⁴²⁶ He was, to be sure, asked by Duan and Feng to be their mediator in February 1918, but his effort failed, and Xu again retired to Henan and went out of the limelight of political life.

Yet Xu had clearly not given up on politics, but was rather merely waiting for an opportune time to reassert himself. Xu was from the beginning very careful not to get entangled in the rivalry between Duan and Feng. Therefore, even though Xu was on close terms with Duan, he never publicly expressed a clear-cut opinion on the issue of war with the Southern provinces. This was also why even Feng would find Xu as an acceptable mediator in their dispute. Xu's ambiguous position was apparent in a gathering in late January in Xu's mansion, in which Duan Qirui, Feng Guozhang, Xu Shucheng and Xu Shichang himself were present. In this meeting, Xu Shichang was plainly trying to stay away from the controversy. Even when Duan passionately criticized Feng's peace policy and bitterly remarked that it would not work, Xu Shichang remained silent, showing neither support nor disapproval.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶See his diaries *Taoyangzhai riji*, deposited in the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, Tianjin. I am grateful to the Academy for granting me access to the documents.

⁴²⁷Kexueyuan, *Xu Shucheng*, p.7 (no.13).

Xu's opportunity came in the summer of 1918, when the rivalry between Duan and Feng reached a climax, and when the Beijing government was hovering between war and peace. To bolster his position, Xu aligned himself with the so-called Old Communications Clique (OCC). The OCC was a very powerful faction in late Qing and the times of Yuan Shikai, and its members had extensive connections in the political and in particular financial worlds.⁴²⁸ One of its key members, Zhu Qiqian, was the protege of Xu, and Xu had also been on close terms with its leader, Liang Shiyi, because Liang had worked under Xu in the Board of Postal Service and Communications during the Qing.⁴²⁹ The OCC members fell from grace in 1916 because they supported Yuan's abortive monarchical scheme, but soon they were back to the political limelight. During the 1918 elections, the OCC struck an alliance with the Anfu Club, and helped the latter in scoring its landslide victory.⁴³⁰ The OCC itself captured about eighty seats in the parliament as well.

Xu's alliance with the OCC was a great asset to him, not only because the OCC would help him to campaign aggressively for the presidency, but also because with the OCC doing all the campaigning on his behalf, Xu was able to preserve his image as the "outsider" and not get tangled up with the factional politics of the day. It is true that the OCC commanded only a small number of seats in both houses, but because the Provisional Constitution of 1912 stipulated that three-thirds of the members of parliament were required to be present before any vote could be cast, the OCC became a force to be reckoned with in this rather peculiar political system. Thanks to this

⁴²⁸S. MacKinnon, "Liang Shih-i and the Communications Clique", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 29 no.3 (May 1970), pp.

⁴²⁹Woxiu, *Xiaozhuan*, 1:15. Xu was already relying heavily on Liang at this time.

⁴³⁰*Shibao* 29 July 1918, p.2.

system, the OCC, with the help of other small political parties, could sabotage any measure the Anfu Club might want to pass, and the large majority Xu Shucheng and Duan commanded could in reality mean little.

Xu's effort did not stop there. Seeing that Duan and Xu Shucheng had become the *de facto* masters of the country after their electoral success, Xu started to aggressively campaign for their goodwill and support. For instance, being a distinguished literary figure himself, Xu Shichang frequently invited Xu Shucheng to dinner parties, and lavished great praises on Xu Shucheng's literary ability to pander to the latter's vanity.⁴³¹ To further endear himself to Xu Shucheng, Xu even rented out his private mansion in Beijing to the Anfu Club for its activities.⁴³² If this was not enough, Xu also spent a great deal of money in lobbying before parliamentary members and buying their votes.⁴³³ It was therefore no surprise that Xu would in early September be voted nearly unanimously by the parliament as the fourth president of the Republic. The opportunity certainly presented itself, but Xu had himself laid down all the groundwork to ensure that he would not miss the opportunity when it did come to him.

Before formally taking up the presidential office in October, Xu took several steps to tighten his control over the administration. Firstly, he tried hard to persuade Duan Qirui to give up his intention of staying on as premier. Xu realized that if Duan was to remain in control of the cabinet, he would likely be reduced to a mere rubber-

⁴³¹Zeng, "Huanhai", p.39.

⁴³²Zeng, "Huanhai", p.39.

⁴³³Shibao 31 August 1918, p.3.

stamp of Duan's policies. But at this point Xu's position was still insecure at best, and he realized that he had to handle this matter delicately. Xu painstakingly explained to Duan that it was in his interests to resign, because or else Feng Guozhang, who was about to step down from the presidency, would remain forever hostile to him.⁴³⁴ In the end, thinking that he would still be in control of the administration with his command of the army,⁴³⁵ Duan listened to Xu's advice, and agreed to resign simultaneously from office with Feng.

Xu's second move was to ensure that the vice-presidency would not fall into the hands of a person who might compete with him for political power. As I have said, Duan's intention was to use the vice-presidency as a prize for whichever military general willing to resume the war effort against the South, and both Cao Kun and Zhang Zuolin were interested in the offer. Xu, however, realized that it was imperative that neither of them was to get the vice-presidency. This was firstly because both Cao and Zhang would surely resume the war effort should they get the position, and Xu's administration would consequently be locked into a war policy against the South. Secondly, Xu realized that Cao and Zhang could easily encroach upon his powers as president if either of them was to become the vice-president. Most importantly of all, if the vice-presidency was to be left vacant, Xu knew he could use it as a prize to induce the Southern military generals to negotiate for peace.⁴³⁶ All these reasons explain why Xu would secretly work with the OCC to block the election of the vice-president. Under most constitutional systems this would have been difficult,

⁴³⁴*Shibao* 15 September 1918, p.2; Zhang, "Neige", p.202.

⁴³⁵This was apparent from the telegram he issued after he decided to step down, instructing his supporters that there would not be a change in policy: see *Shibao* 2 September 1918, p.2.

⁴³⁶Cen, *Liang*, 1:431-432.

because Duan's Anfu Club controlled more than two-thirds of the votes in both houses. Yet under the Chinese system this was possible, because constitutionally three-quarters of the members of parliaments had to be present before any election could take place. Together with the Research Clique, the OCC frustrated the leaders of Anfu Club by repeatedly staying away from the election.⁴³⁷ In fact, through intense lobbying and the distribution of cash incentives, the OCC was able to lure an increasing number of members of parliament away from the vote on the vice-presidency, many of them belonging to the Anfu Club.⁴³⁸

So the stage was set for Xu Shichang. On the eve of his inauguration he had already taken steps to bolster his position in the administration. He did not have to worry about Duan Qirui remaining as premier and dictating policies to him, and neither did he have to worry about a vice-president on his back who might be a threat to his position. The next step for Xu was to decide what policies he would want to pursue, and how he would pursue them, especially if he was to face opposition.

Xu's Open Fight with Duan: His Strategies

In his inaugural speech on 10 October, Xu spelt out the problems the country was facing and the challenges that lay ahead. He spoke generally about the need to suppress brigandage and maintain law and order, the need to promote trade and commerce, and the need to restore the moral values of the nation. He, in particular,

⁴³⁷*Shibao* 13 October 1918, p.3; 16 October 1918, p.3.

⁴³⁸The fact that members of the Anfu Club might not always vote according to Club lines was already apparent in August: see *Shibao* 31 August 1918, p.3. See also *Shibao* 22 October 1918, p.2.

talked about how destructive the civil war in the past year had been, and the need to restore peace, especially in view of the upcoming peace conference after the World War. Yet at this point it was still very difficult to tell what policy Xu wanted to pursue regarding the Southern provinces.⁴³⁹ Xu's inaugural speech exemplified the same ambiguous approach he had been taking toward this question in the past months. While on some occasions Xu might seem to whole-heartedly support Duan's war policy, on other occasions he also seemed to be sympathetic to those who advocated peace negotiations.⁴⁴⁰ In this speech, it is true that Xu talked about the importance of achieving peace, yet he did not say specifically under what circumstances would he entertain negotiations with the South.⁴⁴¹ We have to remember that even someone as warlike as Duan claimed that he was for peace, although the fact that he made such harsh demands on the South meant *in reality* that he was for war. So what was of intense public interest at that time was whether Xu was in fact for peace or for war.

And the public would soon have the answer. Within days after Xu formally became president, Xu began to reveal his true intentions, and started an aggressive campaign for peace negotiations with the South. While until his inauguration Xu Shichang had been careful not to offend either Duan or Xu Shucheng,⁴⁴² Xu took a radically different approach soon after the inauguration. There was clearly a new-found sense of confidence of Xu in his own power and in his ability to navigate his

⁴³⁹This speech of Xu was widely published. See He, "Nianpu: part two", pp.30-32.

⁴⁴⁰Xu's attitude was indeed very ambiguous. See *Shibao* 29 September 1918, p.1; *Shibao* 12 September 1918, p.2; *Shibao*, 3 October 1918,p.2.

⁴⁴¹He, "Nianpu: part two", p.30. Xu also did not denounce the war policy, and said that the war policy pursued in the past year was actually intended to achieve peace.

⁴⁴²For instance, Xu did not want any discussions on the selection of the new premier before his inauguration, for fear that it might arouse the suspicion of Duan: see *Shibao* 6 September 1918, p.3.

own policies. A good indication of this was that when Xu Shucheng tried to schedule an appointment with Xu to discuss Xu's peace policy in mid-October, Xu repeatedly ignored him, and for weeks Xu Shucheng was not even able to see Xu Shichang.⁴⁴³ On 24 October, Xu issued a mandate declaring the cessation of all hostilities, and publicly announced that he would make peace negotiations with the South his first priority.

Why would Xu want to pursue a policy which he knew for sure would cause the wrath of most of his military generals? One reason might be that Xu genuinely believed in the futility of war, and loathed the widespread destruction it caused. Perhaps Xu saw that since the World War had come to an conclusion, it was important for China to restore unity or it would lose out in the international peace conference. Perhaps he also saw that peace was what the public wanted, as I have described in an earlier chapter. But what must have been a very important consideration for Xu was the fact that he knew it would be *in his interest* to pursue a peace policy. Since Duan was in favor of war with the South, the only way a civilian like himself could rise above Duan was to pursue a policy *opposite* to Duan's. If Xu had opted to follow Duan's lead and favored war, then the best he could have done was an *assistant* to Duan, and never an equal of Duan. Furthermore, a war policy would inevitably mean the subordination of the civilian administration to military needs and the demands of the war machinery, and this could only spell the further growth of the power of Duan and Xu Shucheng. As the leader of the OCC, Liang Shiyi, later admitted to his

⁴⁴³Kexueyuan, *Xu Shucheng*, p.378 (26 October 1918, no.1399); Wang Yanmin, *Xu Shucheng zhuan*, pp.179-180.

followers, the peace policy was Xu's most effective weapon in his power struggle with Duan.⁴⁴⁴

It is with this context that one can understand why Xu would choose peace over war. In retrospect, while it is difficult to ascertain the exact time when Xu made up his mind to pursue peace, it is likely that it was well before he was elected as president by the parliament. In fact, as early as in June 1918, Liang Shiyi, on the pretext of attending his daughter's wedding, went to Guangdong and explored for Xu what the Southern government would demand in negotiations.⁴⁴⁵ Granted the political utility of a peace policy to Xu, but what is interesting is why Xu thought he was capable of acting against the wishes of Duan. Duan was, needless to say, a very formidable rival, and he responded to Xu's "rebellion" by taking steps to strengthen his own position *vis-a-vis* Xu's. Firstly, Duan began to greatly expand the role of the War Participation Bureau, in which he was the chairman. This Bureau was established in the wake of China's decision to participate in the World War, and Duan had from its inception used it to strengthen his military position and expand his armies. To undermine Xu's administration, Duan worked to expand the functions of the Bureau, and soon the Bureau began to encroach upon the functions of government ministries in matters such as financial policies, policing, and the management of natural resources.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴Cen, *Liang*, 2:42-43. This was the view of Cao Rulin as well: Cao Rulin, *Yisheng zhi huiyi*, p.184.

⁴⁴⁵Cen, *Liang*, 1:408, 415.

⁴⁴⁶USDS 893.00/2893 Reinsch to Secretary of State, 19 October 1918.

This was but one aspect of Duan's counter-attack. While Duan publicly said that he wanted to retire from the forefront of the political scene, he was in fact waging a vicious political battle against Xu and his peace policy. Already before Xu's inauguration, Zhang Zuolin, the strongest supporter of Duan's war policy, was flexing his muscles. As I have described, he sent part of his Fengtian divisions to the vicinity of Shanghai, causing a scare to the pro-peace military governor of Jiangsu, Li Chun. In the weeks around Xu's inauguration ceremony, Xu Shucheng closed down as many as eight newspapers which were critical of Duan.⁴⁴⁷ When Xu Shichang tried to nominate his protege, Qian Nengxun, as the new premier, the Anfu Club repeatedly refused to approve the nomination, and openly questioned Xu's choice. They also declared that unless and until Cao Kun was elected as vice-president, they would not entertain the idea of giving their blessing to Qian as the premier.⁴⁴⁸

Indeed and in fact, the parliament soon became a forum of partisan attack against Xu. For instance, some members of the Anfu Club viciously criticized Xu for granting excessive honors to government officials and military officers, despite the fact that this was clearly within the prerogatives of the president, not to mention the fact that this was plainly a trivial matter.⁴⁴⁹ To make peace negotiations difficult for Xu, members of the Club proposed in November 1918 to form a committee to draft a permanent constitution immediately. The ulterior motive of this proposal was to make sure that the Southern provinces be left out in the drafting process, with the intention

⁴⁴⁷ *Shibao* 10 October 1918, p.2. This included the famous newspaper of the Research Clique, *Chenzhong bao*.

⁴⁴⁸ *Shibao* 6 November 1918 p.1; 8 November 1918, p.2.

⁴⁴⁹ *Canyiyuan*, Session One, vol.3 (1918), no.41, pp.66-67.

of further widening the gulf between the North and the South.⁴⁵⁰ Even more seriously, members of the Club repeatedly threatened to impeach Qian, who was at this time the Acting Premier.⁴⁵¹ They were probably well-aware of the fact that under the provisions of Provisional Constitution, they had very little chance of success, but they thought their actions would intimidate Xu and Qian showcase their own strength. The culmination of this counter-attack campaign was the military conference in Beijing November, in which most Northern military generals participated. In the conference, Zhang Zuolin, speaking for Duan Qirui's war policy, bitterly attacked Xu's peace effort. What was alarming to Xu was that Duan and Zhang were now able to amass the support of most of the generals in their push for war.⁴⁵²

So in face of such stiff challenge from the military, what could Xu do? As we shall see, Xu was very innovative in coming up with ways to defend his position and policy, and by examining his various strategies we will be able to understand how and why a civilian politician like Xu Shichang was able to wage a political battle against the military:

a. Forming Alliances

To fight Duan effectively, Xu began to form a "grand alliance" which included his own old friends and Duan's political enemies. Xu's alliance with OCC was a good

⁴⁵⁰*Canyiyuan*, Session One, vol.4 (1918), no.15, pp.40-48. My thanks to the Academia Sinica, Taiwan, for allowing me access to these materials. My analysis of some of the debates show that those debates were divided along party lines: the pro-Duan Anfu Club vs the pro-Xu OCC.

⁴⁵¹Qian was only the Acting Premier because the parliament refused to confirm his nomination. See *Shibao* 27 November 1918, p.1; 29 November 1918, p.1.

⁴⁵²*Shuntian shibao* 8 November 1918, p.2.

example, but there were others. Realizing that the government would need a great deal of money for the upcoming peace negotiations, Xu lobbied hard to have the powerful Minister of Communications, Cao Rulin, stay in office. Cao was a key piece in Xu's puzzle, not only because Cao was well-connected in the financial world, but also because Cao was a seasoned negotiator of foreign loans, especially those from Japan.⁴⁵³ Once again, Xu's past connections served him well. Cao had known Xu for a long time, and as I have described earlier in the chapter, it was Xu who recommended Cao for promotion when Cao was still an unknown in the bureaucracy.⁴⁵⁴ To give Cao added incentives to stay, Xu made Cao concurrently the Minister of Finance and Minister of Communications.⁴⁵⁵

Xu also put it on top of his list of priorities to align himself with political factions which had been marginalized by Duan and Xu Shucheng. This was apparent in Xu's appointment of Liang Qichao and other members of the Research Clique into the newly established Committee on Foreign Policy. The Committee was directly responsible for advising the President on foreign affairs, and Xu paid Liang and his associates very well for their work.⁴⁵⁶ Why the Research Clique? Not only because it was a powerful political faction, but also because its members had recently become disaffected with Duan. This requires some explanation. As I have explained in earlier

⁴⁵³M. Chi, "Ts'ao Ju-lin (1876-1966): His Japanese Connections", *The Chinese and the Japanese* ed. A. Iriye, pp.140-160.

⁴⁵⁴Cao himself acknowledged the fact that he owed a great deal to Xu: see Cao, *Yisheng*, p.63.

⁴⁵⁵Cao, *Yisheng*, pp.180-181. Xu actually told Cao confidentially in September 1918 that he would pursue a peace policy, and so Cao knew that in helping Xu he would be working against Duan Qirui's interests. But Cao said that he still decided to side with Xu because he valued his long-time friendship with Xu. In all likelihood, Xu's offer was probably too good for Cao to decline.

⁴⁵⁶Tao, *Beiyang*, 2:861.

chapters, in the wake of Duan's suppression of the Zhang Xun revolt in July 1917, members of the Research Clique lent their full support to Duan and worked closely with him. They obviously hoped that they would become the majority party in parliament after the 1918 elections, now that the Guomindang was gone. But things were to go awfully wrong for them, because not only did Duan fail to show support for them during the elections, but his Anfu Club in fact mercilessly crushed their candidates in many electoral districts.⁴⁵⁷ The Clique, as a result, came out of the 1918 elections limping and retaining only a handful of seats. Liang and his allies were bitterly frustrated, and started to publicly and viciously attack Duan.⁴⁵⁸ This was why Liang and his associates were ready to join hands with Xu, because they shared with Xu a common enemy in Duan Qirui.

Xu also lobbied hard for the support of Duan's opponents *within* the military. As I have already described earlier in the chapter, Xu managed to use Feng Guozhang's dissatisfaction against Duan as a means to persuade Duan to step down from the premiership. In the immediate months after his inauguration, Xu also worked closely with Li Chun, who soon became Xu's right-hand man in charge of preparing for negotiations with the Southern provinces.⁴⁵⁹ This was also why Xu would later want to hold peace negotiations with the South in Nanjing, because it was an area firmly within Li's control.

⁴⁵⁷ See Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, pp.94-101.

⁴⁵⁸ See *Shibao* 27 August 1918, p.2. Members of the Anfu Club hit back, and the attacks were nasty and personal.

⁴⁵⁹ "Tiaohe" in *Yijiuyijiu* ed. Kexueyan, pp.94-95.

Indeed, one of Xu's prime strategies was to play the military generals one against another, and thoroughly exploit the existing cracks within the military establishment. For instance, the American minister in Beijing, Paul Reinsch, reported that one of Xu's favorite tactics was to meet with the military generals *individually* instead of *en masse*. Thus Xu was often able to adapt his arguments to each of their individual circumstances and often win them over.⁴⁶⁰ This strategy of "divide and rule" was especially apparent when Xu appointed General Jin Yunpeng as Minister of War into his cabinet. Jin was one of the major military generals at that time, having served as the military governor of Shandong during the regime of Yuan Shikai. Together with Xu Shucheng, he was widely recognized as one of Duan's most trusted associates, and it was Jin who went on the behalf of Duan to Tokyo in 1917 to sign a secret military agreement with Japan.⁴⁶¹ But soon the relations between Duan and Jin went sour, much of it having to do again with Xu Shucheng. Jin was very disturbed by Xu's arrogance and his attempt to monopolize power within Duan's government. Jin became the more frustrated when he found that Duan would simply give a free-hand to Xu in his dealings.⁴⁶² It was reported that Jin once told Duan that he would not work for Duan as long as Xu Shucheng was in Duan's service, but Duan backed Xu and in fact reprimanded Jin.⁴⁶³ Xu Shichang's appointment of Jin was, therefore, a move intended precisely to exploit this rivalry in Duan's camp. And Xu indeed got what he hoped for. As soon as Jin assumed office, he began to expand the functions of the

⁴⁶⁰USDS 893.00/2946 Baker (Consul General in Mukden) to Secretary of State, 22 November 1918.

⁴⁶¹Wang, *Xu Shucheng*, p.165.

⁴⁶²*Shibao* 23 August 1918, p.2.

⁴⁶³Kexueyuan, *Xu Shucheng*, pp.316-317 (21 August 1918, no.1149); Wang, *Xu Shucheng*, p.166.

Ministry of War, and relentlessly sought to undermine the power of the War Participation Bureau under Duan and Xu Shucheng.⁴⁶⁴

b. Building Up Popular Support

When Xu was rumored to be the next president in the summer of 1918, there is no doubt that there was a great deal of support for him in the political arena, very much because of his credentials and his wide-ranging connections across the political spectrum. In fact, when news of Xu's election reached the Southern military government in Guangzhou, even its Chief Director, Cen Chunxuan, gave a curiously ambiguous response. It is true that Cen condemned the election as unconstitutional, yet he also praised Xu's ability and showed a great deal of respect for Xu as a person.⁴⁶⁵ This response was perhaps not surprising, not only because of Cen's previous connections with Xu, but also because Cen knew that Xu was less likely to prefer a war policy than Duan was. Likewise, the Chinese public, as reflected by contemporary Chinese newspapers, seemed to overwhelmingly endorse Xu's election. Although many political commentators admitted that Xu was in many ways an unknown quantity, they rested their hopes on Xu to pursue peace negotiations and end the civil war. In any case, given the fact that Duan Qirui was the only other serious candidate, they would much more prefer to have Xu to the warlike Duan.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴Wang, *Xu Shucheng*, p.166.

⁴⁶⁵Text in Cen, *Liang*, 1:433-434. The newspapers were not unaware of the implications of Cen's reply. *Shibao* 18 September 1918, p.2.

⁴⁶⁶This is very obvious if one reads newspapers such as *Shuntian shibao* or *Shibao*.

Granted that Xu managed to amass considerable political and popular support, but we must not ignore some of his political liabilities as well. What worried many contemporaries was the fact that Xu had all along maintained very close ties with the Manchus. Xu was very open regarding his respect for his former masters, and in a public gesture to showcase his loyalty, he retired from politics for two years after Emperor Puyi's abdication.⁴⁶⁷ In fact, Xu continued to go to the Forbidden Palace to pay his respects to Puyi and the Manchu princes well after that, and he made no apologies for it. During Zhang Xun's attempt to restore the Manchus in the summer of 1917, it was public knowledge that Zhang went to solicit the support of Xu, although Xu apparently refused to be part of the plan.⁴⁶⁸ But even after the Zhang Xun debacle, Xu did not shy away from maintaining a close relationship with the Manchu court. In fact, according to Xu's diaries, the primary reason why he decided to accept the presidency was that the Manchu court wanted him to. The Manchu princes felt, and quite rightly, that Xu would be able to protect its interests should he become president.⁴⁶⁹ This Manchu connection became the most apparent when Xu issued a pardon for Zhang Xun immediately after he became president.⁴⁷⁰ It is therefore with good reasons that some people feared the rise of Xu would mean the re-emergence of the Manchus and maybe even another Manchu restoration attempt.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷Zhang, "Wuo suo", pp.226-227.

⁴⁶⁸Shen, *Pingzhan*, pp.304-308. Because of the lack of documentation, it is very difficult to know the exact involvement of Xu in the restoration attempt. Hu Pingsheng, for instance, believed that Xu was deeply involved, although the evidence he provides is at best suspect: see Hu, *Fubipai*, pp.85-87.

⁴⁶⁹Xu, *Taoyang*, entry of 15 September 1918.

⁴⁷⁰R. Johnston, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, p.162. Johnston was Emperor Puyi's English tutor.

⁴⁷¹There were a great deal of celebratory activities in the Forbidden City upon Xu's inauguration: W.J.F. Jenner ed., *From Emperor to Citizen: The Autobiography of Aisin Gioro Pu Yi*, pp.98-100. See *Shibao* 5 October 1918, p.2, for rumors of a restoration attempt. Hu Jingyi, a general of the Southern

Xu's strategy was neither to clarify his position, nor to disown his special relationship with the Manchus, but simply to steer public attention away from this issue. Xu's tactic was to shift the public's attention toward other matters, particularly the question concerning the restoration of peace to the country, which Xu was confident was what the Chinese public cared the most after all. Even though Xu was already well into his sixties by this time, Xu projected himself to the public as an energetic and purposeful president who cared about the welfare of China and who sought to cure the many ills of the country. Immediately after his election, Xu announced that he would cut down on the expenses of the president's office as well as the bureaucracy in general.⁴⁷² He stressed the importance of maintaining law and order in the country, and openly criticized those generals who had failed to do so.⁴⁷³ He talked about the need to promote education, and laid down plans for improving its quality.⁴⁷⁴ He announced that he was determined to stamp out opium-smoking, and he quickly organized campaigns destroying opium and enlightening the public of the ills of opium-smoking. This last move was in particular popular, because it established Xu's credentials as a person concerned with the moral issues of the nation, and it won him wide acclaim.⁴⁷⁵ It was therefore not coincidental that some political commentators would soon become enthusiastic about Xu's regime, and said that Xu's

government, was shocked by Xu's pardon to Zhang Xun, and was fearful of a restoration attempt in the near future: see his diary, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo ed., *Hu Jingyi riji*, pp.29-30.

⁴⁷²*Shibao* 16 September 1918, p.2.

⁴⁷³*Shibao* 8 November 1918, p.2.

⁴⁷⁴*Shibao* 3 December 1918, p.2.

⁴⁷⁵See SHA 1003/830.

reformist activism was something which had been lacking in the government since the days of Yuan Shikai.⁴⁷⁶

Xu realized that his most important task yet was to drum up popular support for his peace policy. Historians have conventionally seen the cry for peace in this period as a spontaneous outgrowth of the increasing disillusionment with the destruction caused by the civil war, and there is a great deal of truth in this view. But one must also not ignore the fact that Xu had in fact spent a great deal of time and energy to sway public opinion to his side. The Peace Promotion Society, established in October 1918, was a case in point.

On the surface, the Peace Promotion Society was a non-political organization aimed at, as its name suggested, promoting the restoration of peace in the country. But a careful analysis of its membership will underscore the fact that it was in fact very much a political machinery with the purpose of bolstering Xu's peace policy. It is true that the Society included in its membership many non-political figures, yet it was at heart an organization by and large controlled by the OCC and the Research Clique. Not only were Liang Shiyi and the OCC responsible for its inception in the first place,⁴⁷⁷ but the Society was also filled with key members of both the OCC and the Research Clique, such as Zhu Qiqian and Xiong Xiling.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ *Shibao* 8 November 1918, p.2; USDS 893.00/2921 Reinsch to Secretary of State, 23 November 1918.

⁴⁷⁷ *Shibao* 18 October 1918, p.2.

⁴⁷⁸ See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.135-138. The fact that Xu was a motor behind the ostensibly non-political Society was apparent to the Japanese: see the important document in Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho 7 vol.2, part 1, p.80 (4 November 1918, document 94).

The Society would turn out to be a major source of support for Xu's peace policy, and in fact it did so well that Xu sent Qian Nengxun to organize a similar peace society in November 1918.⁴⁷⁹ *Why and how?* First and foremost, because the Society was not a government organization and claimed to be non-partisan, it was able to attract members from very diverse background: from anti-Duan political figures such as former presidents Li Yuanhong and Feng Guozhang, to the President of Beijing University, Cai Yuanpei and the leading industrialist at that time, Zhang Jian, to even moderate Guomindang members such as Gu Zhongxiu. Many of them would not have felt comfortable to be directly involved in the power struggle between Xu and Duan, although their participation in this ostensibly non-political organization was, as they probably well knew, effectively an endorsement for Xu and a slap in Duan's face. The credentials of these members further served to legitimize Xu's peace policy as well.

Furthermore, the Society's organizers were masters in terms of their skills in capturing the media's attention. When one reads the newspapers at that time, one cannot but be impressed by the fact that the Society was often able to dominate headlines, either by presenting new proposals on how to resolve the constitutional question and restore unity, or by organizing large-scale conferences in support of the peace effort.⁴⁸⁰ Indeed, the Society successfully put the peace question on top of the national agenda, and made peace negotiations with the South look like imperative as well as inevitable. Last and by no means least, the Society became a machinery for Xu and Liang to attract members of the Anfu Club to their camp. Because the Society was ostensibly non-political, even Anfu Club members did not necessarily shy away from

⁴⁷⁹ *Shibao* 21 November 1918, p.3.

⁴⁸⁰ See for instance, *Shibao* 21 October 1918, p.2; 4 November 1918, p.2.

attending its meetings, especially when Liang was giving them a great deal of financial incentives to do so.⁴⁸¹ The Society's meetings soon became a venue for Liang to recruit Anfu Club members. In fact, armed with the vast financial resources from Xu's government, Liang was very successful in his effort, and a considerable number of Anfu Club members actually joined the peace movement.⁴⁸²

c. Soliciting Foreign Support

The backing of the foreign powers also turned out to be of great importance to Xu's success. In retrospect it is interesting why the foreign powers could become so powerful in influencing the internal politics of China, but this was indeed what happened, and the leverage the powers commanded was the reason why even the Southern government in Guangdong believed it was its first priority to get foreign recognition.⁴⁸³ In many ways this should not be surprising. The foreign powers were in custody of the salt and customs revenue, which had by this time become the main source of income for the Beijing government. Furthermore, the Chinese government was heavily reliant on the loans negotiated from the powers, without which no wars could be waged, and no government department would remain solvent. It was because of these reasons that all political parties at that time were watching closely the attitude of the foreign legations.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ *Shibao* 27 October 1918, p.2.

⁴⁸² *Shibao* 30 October 1918, p.2.

⁴⁸³ Sun Yatsen, for instance, was strongly lobbying for foreign recognition: see USDS 893.00/2901 R. Lansing to the President, 25 November 1918.

⁴⁸⁴ Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.59-64.

The foreign powers, to be sure, had all along been against the destruction the civil war was causing, but up till the presidency of Xu they had chosen to stay neutral and not get involved. In fact, when the American minister, Paul Reinsch, talked to Duan Qirui in June 1918 about the need to restore peace, Duan was able to impress upon Reinsch that the war was a necessary evil, and that genuine peace would not come until the Southern provinces were defeated.⁴⁸⁵ But the election of Xu gave the foreign powers new hope, and Xu himself started to lobby for their support for his peace policy rigorously. Even before formally becoming president, Xu took steps to strengthen his ties with the powers, America in particular. In mid-September, Xu sent the Chinese Minister in Washington D.C. to talk with an assistant secretary of the State Department, and off the record told the American government what policies he was planning for his government. Xu stressed to the American government that his top priority was the restoration of internal peace and the cessation of all factional hostilities. Xu wanted to be assured that his peace policies would be appreciated and supported by the American government, if not publicly, at least privately. The American government responded by saying that it was inappropriate to support Xu publicly before he became president, but promised to send a public communication to Xu upon his inauguration.⁴⁸⁶

The American government kept its promise, and President Wilson indeed sent a public telegram congratulating Xu on his inauguration. In this telegram, Wilson emphasized that it was imperative for China to end all internal strife and be reunited, and said that it was only with this accomplished would China be able to play a role in

⁴⁸⁵USDS 893.00/2866 Reinsch to Seretary of State, 27 June 1918.

⁴⁸⁶USDS 893.00/2880, Memorandum of conversation had with the Chinese Minister today, Department of State, Office of the Third Assistant Secretary, 17 September 1918.

international affairs.⁴⁸⁷ This telegram apparently "made a great impression on both the officials and the public", and it served to strongly strengthen Xu's position.⁴⁸⁸ After this Xu continued to keep in close contact with Reinsch, meeting with him in person a few times in October alone. Reinsch, as the *de facto* leader of the foreign delegations in Beijing, subsequently publicly endorsed Xu's policies, and greatly increased Xu's prestige in the political arena.⁴⁸⁹

Xu also lobbied hard for the support of the new Hara Kei cabinet in Japan, which had since the summer of 1918 replaced the pro-Duan Terauchi administration. The Hara Kei government, contrary to the position taken by the Terauchi administration, took the view that the continued civil strife would hurt Japanese interests, and believed that Japan should put pressure on Beijing to restore peace.⁴⁹⁰ Again, Liang Shiyi was given the responsibility of liaising with the Japanese government. Liang assured the Japanese government that Xu was sincere in his wishes to pursue peace, and Liang kept the Japanese fully informed of Xu's peace strategy and advised them what they could do to help.⁴⁹¹ In late October, together with the British government, the Japanese government started to explore the possibility of issuing a joint note with other powers to the Beijing and the Guangzhou governments

⁴⁸⁷Reinsch, *American Diplomat*, p.319.

⁴⁸⁸USDS 893.00/2896 Reinsch to Secretary of State 26 October 1918; USDS 893.00/2915 Reinsch to Secretary of State, 8 November 1918.

⁴⁸⁹USDS 893.00/2915 Reinsch to Secretary of State, 8 November 1918.

⁴⁹⁰Gaimusho, *Bunso*, Taisho 7 vol.2, part 1, pp.59-60 (21 October 1918, document 62).

⁴⁹¹See for instance, Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho vol.2, part 1, pp.31-32 (23 September 1918, document 35); pp.80-81 (4 November 1918, document 94); pp.95-96 (10 November 1918, document 109)

to urge them to conduct peace negotiations.⁴⁹² Xu actually would have preferred the note to be delivered only when peace terms were ripe,⁴⁹³ but eventually, the note, cosigned by America, Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan, was sent to the Chinese government on 2 December, earlier than Xu had anticipated. Yet the timing of this document was in fact perfect, because it arrived in the midst of the military conference in Beijing, in which military generals were angrily clamoring for war. The note, which strongly warned China of the danger of the continuation of the civil war, declared that it was imperative for China to seek ways to restore peace and unity.⁴⁹⁴ In a separate statement, the Japanese government also announced that it would withhold such financial assistance to China which would add to the complications of its internal situation.⁴⁹⁵ This meant that the financial resources on which Duan had relied for his War Participation Bureau and the election of the Anfu parliament, would come to an end.

The effect of these statements was dramatic, as they immediately silenced the military generals who had been clamoring for war against the South and who had been viciously attacking Xu.⁴⁹⁶ Members of Anfu Club in parliament also began to withdraw their opposition against Qian Nengxun's candidacy for the premiership,⁴⁹⁷ and Qian's nomination was soon confirmed by both houses. So ironically, even though

⁴⁹²Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho 7 vol.2, part 1, pp.33-34 (30 September 1918, document 36).

⁴⁹³Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho 7 vol.2, part 1, p.80 (4 November 1918, document 94).

⁴⁹⁴See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.142-144.

⁴⁹⁵Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho 7 vol.2, part 1, pp.110-111 (document 126).

⁴⁹⁶*Shibao* 10 December 1918, p.2; Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, Taisho 7 vol.2 part.1, pp.136-137 (6 December 1918, document 161).

⁴⁹⁷*Shibao* 9 December 1918, p.2.

Marxist scholars have for long considered the presence of the foreign powers in China as imperialistic and destructive, the powers in 1918 actually acted as a stabilizing force, helping Xu Shichang's effort to restore peace and unity.

Conclusions

The dramatic emergence of Xu Shichang, I believe, should force us to rethink our conventional assumptions regarding the balance of power between the military and the civil during the early Republic era. Granted the dominance of the military, political power did not necessarily have to emerge from it . Xu Shichang, for instance, was able to use various strategies to bolster his position, and in the end, even triumphed over Duan Qirui, the preeminent military commander at that time: by playing the military generals one against another; by forming alliances with like-minded politicians; by drumming up popular support; and by relying on the backing of the foreign powers. That far from military power being decisive, there was a multi-variant causation at work: foreign support, popular opinion, as well as pure military power.

Indeed, at least in the early months of his presidency, Xu's quest for power was an unqualified success. By the end of the year (1918), and merely two months after his inauguration, Xu had transformed himself from a politician living under the shadow of Duan Qirui, to a president who wielded real control of the government and who enjoyed support from the Chinese public as well as the foreign powers. His protege, Qian Nengxun, at last became the permanent premier, and all impeachment bills against his regime in the parliament were withdrawn. His peace policy was now

supported by the military generals as well, if not in fact, at least in name. In two months' time, Xu would again accomplish something which many analysts thought impossible: the convention of a peace conference in Shanghai, participated by the plenipotentiaries of the Northern and the Southern governments. Xu hoped this conference would resolve all the problems between the North and the South, constitutional or otherwise, and restore peace and unity to the country. In the next chapter we will see how successful his effort would be.

Chapter Six:

Between Conflict and Compromise: The Shanghai Peace Conference of 1919*

We protect the constitution only for the sake of the country. But if the country itself cannot be saved, then how can we protect the constitution?

Tang Shaoyi, chief delegate of the Southern government in the 1919 Shanghai Peace Conference, 30 October 1918.⁴⁹⁸

On 20 February 1919, the long anticipated peace conference between Beijing and Canton was convened in Shanghai. President Xu Shichang must have breathed a deep sigh of relief. After months of public negotiations as well as back-door maneuvering, he finally managed to pull the two sides to the negotiating table. Measured by the media frenzy it generated, the Conference deserved to be ranked as one of the epochal moments in modern Chinese history. Judging from the Herculean tasks it sought to accomplish, the Conference was also probably one of the most ambitious peace attempts in modern memory, in China or otherwise. After all, Xu was hoping not only to restore unity to a country which had been embroiled in a bitter civil war for the past eighteen months, but also to resolve the constitutional questions which

*In the following sections I will make use of a great deal of archives, especially those from the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing. A portion of these archives have been published, and so when possible, I will quote from the published materials to help readers who want to track down my sources. I wish to thank the Second Historical Archives for allowing me access to much of its materials, especially those from the personal archives of Zhu Qiqian.

⁴⁹⁸Tang Shaoyi to the Canton Senate and House of Representatives et.al., "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", p.18 (document 19)

had for the same period divided the nation. To get a sense of how difficult the situation was, one needs to look no further from the existence of the two rivalling parliaments at this time, one in Beijing, the other in Canton.

Despite the obvious importance of the Shanghai Peace Conference, curiously it has up-to-now received scant attention from scholars.⁴⁹⁹ This is partly, I think, due to the fact that much of the relevant archival materials on the Conference have been inaccessible to researchers until recent years. But this lack of attention, I believe, also underscores a Whiggish approach toward history which has subconsciously crept into the interpretations on the early Republican period. Since the Peace Conference in the end broke up in the wake of the May Fourth demonstrations, scholars have casually assumed that its eventual failure was inevitable in any case. The consequence of this is that the Shanghai Peace Conference has seldom been taken seriously, and even when the Conference is studied, it is often used as yet another demonstration of how Republican politicians failed to work out compromises.⁵⁰⁰

But as I will show, these assumptions are very misleading indeed. In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that the Conference is a prism through which we can understand how Chinese politics worked in the late 1910s, and specifically how Chinese politicians dealt with issues of unity, war and the constitution. The Conference, I believe, was an ambitious attempt aimed at resolving questions concerning Chinese constitutionalism, the balance of power between the center and the

⁴⁹⁹There is, for instance, no full English work and only one Chinese work on this topic, although there are a number of books which deal with the Conference as a related theme.

⁵⁰⁰Foremost in this line of interpretation is Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.144-163, 175. See also Lin Tongfa, *Minba zhi nanbei yihe*, esp. pp.232-234; Shen, *Pingzhuang*, esp. chp.16.

province, and civil-military relations and so on, all in one stroke. It was about not only dealing with the problem of the two parliaments, but also about clarifying the ambiguities of the Provisional Constitution of 1912 which gave rise to the problem in the first place.⁵⁰¹ It was about redefining the relationship between Beijing and the provinces, and restoring the kind of cooperation which existed before July 1917. It was also about recasting the role of the military after the world war and the civil wars, and restoring power to civilian politicians and, above all, civilian institutions. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze how the Conference delegates sought to resolve these questions, and what the issues at stake which were. How close were they to success in late April 1919, the eve of the Conference's break-up?

Other Alternatives?

Granted that Xu was determined to reconcile his government with Canton, but why did he seek to accomplish this *via* a public peace conference? The documents we have may not give us a definitive answer, but they do allow us to speculate on the possible reasons. One possibility is that an open conference would give Xu the opportunity to tap more effectively into the popular support for peace. But a more likely reason was that Xu believed that this was the only way through which he could accomplish genuine peace. It should be pointed out that Xu did try to conduct private negotiations before announcing the convention of a public peace conference. As soon as Xu became president, he sent Liang Shiyi and other secret agents to Guangdong talk with the regional warlord, Lu Rongting, and the Chief Director of the Military

⁵⁰¹ See chapter one.

government, Cen Chunxuan.⁵⁰² Xu's agents, in addition, made exhaustive investigations on the political alignments in the South, and analyzed what it would take to satisfy the demands of the various Southern political factions. On the positive side, they discovered that Lu and Cen were flexible on the constitutional issues and were ready to negotiate with Beijing. Yet on the other hand they also discovered that there were factions which were much more intransigent in terms of their demands, and these factions could easily disrupt the peace process if Beijing did not accommodate to their wishes as well.⁵⁰³ Consequently, Xu realized that any peace settlement based on private agreements with Lu and Cen alone would be shaky at best. Given such circumstances, Xu was in effect compelled to attain peace through a public conference in which factions across the political spectrum in the North and the South would be represented.

The Delegations

By the end of 1918 both Beijing and Canton had assembled their delegations for the Conference. Originally Xu preferred to have Liang Shiyi leading the Northern delegation because of his experience and connections, but members of the Anfu Club in the Beijing parliament vehemently opposed this prospective appointment.⁵⁰⁴ This is not surprising. After all, it was Liang who was responsible for blocking the Club's

⁵⁰²Cen, *Liang*, 1:439. In fact Liang was making preliminary investigations for Xu well before Xu became president: Cen, *Sansui*, 1:415.

⁵⁰³See for instance, one of the reports submitted in November 1918 in Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.46-49 (document 5). See also Shen, *Pingzhuan*, pp.406-417.

⁵⁰⁴Lin, *Minba*, p. 107. Li Chun was also mentioned as a possibility.

plan of electing Cao Kun as the vice-president a few months ago. In the end, Xu settled with Zhu Qiqian, his long-time follower, and someone who had served as Minister of Interior in previous administrations.⁵⁰⁵ Xu put his trust on Zhu not only because Zhu owed his prominence in politics to Xu in the first place, but also because Zhu was actually married to one of Xu's daughters.⁵⁰⁶ The fact that Zhu was a Guizhou native was figured to be an added advantage when negotiating with the Southern provinces.

The composition of the rest of the delegation reflected Xu's effort to accommodate to the various factions in the North at that time. For the remaining ten spots in the delegation, one was given to Feng Guozhang's faction, one to Zhang Zuolin's, one to Li Chun's, two to the Research Clique, and five to Duan Qirui's.⁵⁰⁷ It is ironic that Duan would have that many representatives, since we know that Duan was from the beginning bitterly opposed to the Conference, even though publicly he had remained silent on the issue.⁵⁰⁸ Yet Duan's influence within the delegation was not as strong as it might look on paper. Firstly, Zhu persuaded the Southern delegation to agree on a provision which stipulated that only the chief delegates could initiate discussions. Other delegates were allowed to present their views, to be sure, but they could do so only with the consent of their respective chief delegates.⁵⁰⁹ Furthermore,

⁵⁰⁵Zhu said in his unpublished memoirs that he took up the responsibility only because Xu had been his mentor for long. See his memoirs in his personal archives in SHA 3003/1.

⁵⁰⁶I thank Professor Guo Jianlin of Nankai University, Tianjin, for alerting me to this fact.

⁵⁰⁷See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.146-148.

⁵⁰⁸See Zhu's memoirs SHA 3003/1.

⁵⁰⁹See Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 1 February 1919, Zhongguo dier lishi danganguan ed., "Nanbei yihe zhongduanqian Zhu Qiqian yu Qian Nengxun deng laiwang midianxuan", *Minguo dangan*, (1986:1), pp.8-9.

Xu was himself closely connected with some of the so-called "pro-Duan" delegates. For instance, Wu Dingchang, often labelled as the leader of the "pro-Duan" group in the delegation, was in fact a member of the New Communications Clique led by Cao Rulin, who was Xu's Minister of Communications as well as Minister of Finance at this time. As we shall see, Wu was closely in touch with Xu during the Conference, and was not necessarily on Duan's side all the time.⁵¹⁰ Another so-called "pro-Duan" delegate, Fang Shu, actually served in Xu's secretariat before as well.⁵¹¹ So even though Zhu himself conceded that the Northern delegates were like "sleeping in the same bed but having different dreams",⁵¹² the Northern delegation was still unmistakably Xu's delegation.

The Southern delegation was, by comparison, a much less unified group. Originally some factions wanted Wu Tingfang, a seasoned diplomat, to be the chief delegate, but many were opposed to the appointment, arguing that Wu was too old.⁵¹³ In the end, the task fell upon the shoulders of Tang Shaoyi, who had substantial experience in negotiations. Tang's checkered political career made it impossible for us to label him as belonging to any faction or party. He rose to prominence at about the same time as Xu Shichang, and when Xu was the governor-general of Manchuria, Tang was in fact Xu's subordinate as the governor of Fengtian. The relationship

⁵¹⁰Wu was in fact often the go-between of Xu Shichang and Zhu Qiqian. On 7 April 1919, for instance, he told Zhu that Xu wanted Zhu to try his best to continue negotiations. If Wu were indeed a "pro-Duan" person, he probably would not have said something like this. Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.221-222 (document 231)

⁵¹¹Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.146-147.

⁵¹²Zhu's memoirs, SHA 3003/1.

⁵¹³SHA 3003/12, an undated letter from a person named Lu Xin to Zhu Qiqian. Judging from the contents of the letter it was probably written around December 1918.

between the two always seemed cordial, and they referred to each other as "brothers" in their letters.⁵¹⁴ In the wake of the 1911 Revolution, Tang became the leading delegate of the North in its negotiations with the Guomindang revolutionaries, which in the end resulted in the establishment of the Republic and Yuan Shikai becoming the president.⁵¹⁵

But Tang was soon to take a 180-degree turn in his political sympathies and become a member of the Guomindang. As a result, Tang soon clashed with Yuan Shikai, the person who handpicked him to be the first premier of the Republic in the first place. Tang then resigned from the premiership in 1913, and retired from the forefront of politics for years after that.⁵¹⁶ From then on, it is very difficult to gauge where Tang's political sympathies lay. In fact, even Duan's constitutional revisions and the subsequent *hufa* movement failed to draw a response from Tang, as Tang apparently stayed neutral during the whole controversy despite his Guomindang affiliation. Sun, for instance, offered Tang a cabinet position in his Military government in Canton in late 1917, only to receive an evasive response from Tang. Tang refused to go down to Guangdong take up the appointment despite Sun's repeated pleas, yet neither did he decline the offer.⁵¹⁷ He was similarly ambiguous when the newly reorganized Military government elected him as one of its seven

⁵¹⁴See their correspondence in "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.19-21 (document 19).

⁵¹⁵See Chen Zhengqing, "Liangci 'nanbei yihe' zhong de Tang Shaoyi", *Wenshi ziliao*, 113:145-146.

⁵¹⁶Chen, "Tang Shaoyi", pp.146-152.

⁵¹⁷Tang in the end never took up the position. See *CCER*, 22 August 1917.

directors in May 1918. He accepted the position only after considerable delay, and remained silent on the issue of negotiations with the North.⁵¹⁸

So it was rather difficult even for contemporaries to pinpoint what Tang's political affiliation was, but this was perhaps precisely why he was selected in the first place. The South needed a compromise candidate who was acceptable to the various dueling factions at this time, and Tang was the logical choice. Tang's task was, in retrospect, much more difficult than that of Zhu, not only because Tang did not enjoy the same kind of trust from the Canton government that Zhu enjoyed from Xu Shichang, but also because of the rampant factionalism in the Southern political arena.⁵¹⁹ The Southern delegation, like its Northern counterpart, represented a cross-section of political opinions, holding very different approaches toward the Conference. On the one side, there was Lu Rongting, who for reasons explained in earlier chapters, was prepared to negotiate with Beijing and settle the whole dispute. Similarly, the Chief Director of the Military government, Cen Chunxuan, and his Political Study Society, were equally keen on peace negotiations, and they hoped for a peace settlement which would propel them to prominence and perhaps even Cen to the vice-presidency. On the other side there were Sun Yatsen and the radicals, who at heart opposed any negotiations with Beijing, and agreed to them only because they had no choice. Between the two extremes there were the moderate parliamentarians led by Wu Jinglian, who despite their support for Sun's cause of *hufa*, had come to accept

⁵¹⁸Tang was not in Canton until sometime in September: see CCER, 31 August 1918.

⁵¹⁹This was recognized by contemporaries as well. See the letter by Lu Xin to Zhu Qiqian, dated probably 22 December 1918: SHA 3003/12.

negotiations as the only means to break the deadlock. There were also other factional forces such as the Yunnan Army and the navy.⁵²⁰

The composition of the Southern delegation reflected this diversity of political opinions. Within the delegation, there were two representatives from Lu Rongting's faction, one from Sun Yatsen's, one from the Yunnan Army, one from the navy, three from the Political Study Society, with the remaining two spots being taken by the regional warlords in Sichuan and Guizhou.⁵²¹ The problem for Tang was that unlike the North, there was no predominant faction in the South which was in control in the way Xu was. Therefore, as Tang was to find out, the Shanghai Peace Conference was to become a forum for these internal factional politics to be played out, with he himself often trapped helplessly in the middle.

The Name and the Location

Zhu Qiqian was relatively clear about his objectives because he had Xu's full backing, but Tang in contrast often had to play it by the ear and alertly respond to pressure from different quarters. While Tang's checkered background helped him to become the compromise candidate in the first place, it also meant that no faction had complete confidence in him. This lack of support for Tang is evident from the shocking fact that Tang failed to secure any financial support from any of the factions or the Military government for his expenses in attending the Conference. Tang,

⁵²⁰For the ideologies of these different groups, please see chapters two and three.

⁵²¹See Nathan, *Peking Politics*, p.149.

incredibly enough, actually had to pay his own way for being the chief delegate.⁵²² Tang must also have been aware of the fact that whatever tactics and strategies he might choose to pursue in the negotiations, he would still be vulnerable to the attacks of one faction or another. Ironically enough, however, Tang's weak position, I believe, forced him to become an unyielding negotiator for the South. In order to prove that he was fulfilling his responsibility, and in order to shield himself from possible attacks from the various Southern political factions, Tang was compelled to adopt as uncompromising an attitude as he could. Tang knew very well that he had to satisfy the demands of each and every faction in the South. To earn their trust and continued support, Tang had to show that he was an effective negotiator who could give the South an edge in the negotiations.

If being the chief delegate of the South was such an unenviable task, why did Tang take it in the first place? There can be no doubt that Tang did passionately believe in the urgency of peace, but perhaps more importantly, Tang saw the difficult situation not as a problem but as an opportunity. Tang himself harbored political ambitions at this time, and so the Conference was a perfect chance for him to prove his leadership and political skills. According to reliable reports, Tang was at this juncture working to recreate a new Guomindang which would unite the moderate and the radical elements of the party, and he was rather open regarding his hope to become the leader of this new party.⁵²³ There was, therefore, a lot at stake for Tang to appear successful in the Conference. Tang knew that he had to perform, and he knew he had

⁵²²Luo Yiqun, "Tang Shaoyi Shengping de gaishu", *Guangdong wenshi ziliao*, 13 (1964), p.100.

⁵²³Chen Ce to Wu Jinglian et.al., "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", 11 February 1919, pp.65-66 (document 52). Again, Luo Jiaheng to Wu Jinglian, 20 February 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao". p.69 (document 56).

to be able to please the various factions before his ambition could be realized. In particular, hoping that Sun Yatsen would voluntarily endorse him as the new leader, he was ready to adopt a more radical position in the negotiations to endear himself to Sun.⁵²⁴

It is in this context, I believe, that we can appreciate why Tang was so combative even before the Conference began, when discussions on what the name of the forthcoming peace conference should be, and where it should be held, began in late December 1918. Even though Tang had privately told Xu that he would, as Xu's long-time friend, do everything he could to help Xu complete the peace process,⁵²⁵ this was clearly not the case at all, as the way he negotiated testified. For instance, the proper title of the Conference soon became a bone of contention between the two sides. The Beijing government, on its part, wanted the upcoming conference be called a "Reconstruction" (*Shanhou*) Conference. While some argued that this name would imply that it was a conference about the "reordering of affairs after a rebellion or insurrection",⁵²⁶ the title could also simply mean a conference to settle issues after the preceding disorderly months. Tang, however, insisted that the Conference be called a "Peace" (*Heping*) Conference. Similarly, the place where the Conference should be held soon became a hot debating point between the North and the South as well. Beijing wanted it to be in Nanjing, not only because this was within the sphere of influence of the pro-peace governor Li Chun, but also because it was where the first North-South Peace Conference in 1912 was held. Tang and his associates, however,

⁵²⁴Tang said explicitly that he wanted Sun's endorsement, and he was discussing this with Sun's close associates, Hu Hanmin and Wang Jingwei: "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.65-66.

⁵²⁵See Lu Xin's telegram to Zhu Qiqian on 31 January 1919: SHA 3003/12.

⁵²⁶Nathan, *Peking Politics*, p.150.

contended that the Conference should be held in the foreign concessions in Shanghai, because this was the only place, he claimed, where no outside pressure could be put on the Conference proceedings.⁵²⁷

What is interesting is that Lu Rongting and Cen Chunxuan had in fact privately indicated that they were willing concede on the these matters, but Tang would have none of it.⁵²⁸ In the end, Xu and Zhu gave ground to Tang on both of these issues. This was partly because they wanted the Conference to be under way as quickly as possible, and partly because they saw, and quite rightly, that these issues were at best trivial matters.⁵²⁹ However, Zhu was already deeply troubled by Tang's behavior at this point, not as much because Beijing was eventually forced to give ground, but more because he was shocked as well as dismayed by Tang's complete unwillingness to negotiate on any of these issues. Indeed, in Zhu's eyes, and quite rightly, by adopting a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, Tang was risking the future of the Conference for what Zhu saw were peripheral matters at best. Zhu was in particular upset with what he saw as Tang's hypocrisy: even though Tang always claimed he wanted to help Xu, his actions often made life very difficult for Beijing.⁵³⁰ As Zhu predicted before the Conference began, the upcoming negotiations were going to be in rough waters if Tang continued

⁵²⁷For a brief summary of the arguments of both sides, see Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp.150-151.

⁵²⁸Apparently Lu and Cen told Wu Peifu that they were flexible on this issue: see a letter to Zhu Qiqian on 7 February 1919 in SHA 1003/842.

⁵²⁹Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 1 February 1919 in Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe zhongduanqian", pp.7-8.

⁵³⁰See Zhu Qiqian's two telegrams to Qian Nengxun on 5 February 1919, both in SHA 1003/842.

to adopt this attitude.⁵³¹ And Zhu's grim predictions turned out to be not far from the truth.

The Shaanxi Question

In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that the Conference was in trouble nearly as soon as it was convened in the former German Chambers of Commerce building in the foreign concessions in Shanghai on 20 February 1919. The first major problem which confronted the delegations was the question of Shaanxi. In the wake of Sun Yatsen's *hufa* movement in July 1917, some of Sun's supporters, led by the military general Yu Youren, organized the so-called *Jingguo Army* ("The army to restore order to the nation") in Shaanxi from militias which had traditionally been close to the Guomindang, in an effort to complement the Southern war effort in Hunan. The Army, however, was militarily weak, and at the time of Xu's peace effort it was close to being exterminated.⁵³² This was why when Xu ordered a cessation of hostilities between the North and the South in mid-November 1918, he intended his order to apply only to Hunan. Simply put, Xu refused to recognize the South's position in Shaanxi.

It was only after the vehement protests of the Southern Military government that Xu reconsidered his position. In early January 1919, the Military government vouched for the fact that it would not be in any conference unless their position in

⁵³¹See Zhu Qiqian's second telegram to Qian Nengxun on 5 February 1919, which strongly complained about Tang's style of negotiation: SHA 1003/842.

⁵³²Lin, *Minba*, pp.112-114.

Shaanxi was recognized.⁵³³ Xu, eager to convene his peace conference as soon as possible, was forced to back down once again. In late January and early February, with the mediation of the governor-general Li Chun, a five-point agreement on Shaanxi was reached, in which the two sides consented to a temporary cease-fire. It was furthermore agreed that a mutually acceptable inspector should be sent to Shaanxi examine the situation and demarcate the respective spheres of control between the North and the South.⁵³⁴

But the problem resurfaced as soon as the Conference was convened, and in fact took the spotlight in the very first discussion. In this meeting, Tang bitterly accused Beijing of continuing the war effort in Shaanxi even after the conclusion of the five-point agreement, and demanded Beijing to replace the pro-war military governor of Shaanxi, Chen Shufan.⁵³⁵ On top of this, Tang also cynically questioned whether even if Xu were genuine in his intentions in promoting peace, he would actually have the power to keep his word.⁵³⁶ Tang's uncompromising stance is perhaps not surprising. The Southern military commander in Shaanxi, Yu Youren, who was never in favor of the peace negotiations in the first place,⁵³⁷ was at this time sending a host of inflammatory telegrams to Tang complaining of intrusions from the North. In addition, members of the Canton parliament from Shaanxi were also pressuring Tang

⁵³³This was also why Li Chun was so insistent that Beijing settle with the South on this issue as soon as possible: See Li Chun to Qian Nengxun, 20 December 1918, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.73-75 (document 19).

⁵³⁴See Li Chun to Qian Nengxun, 14 January 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.99-100 (document 40).

⁵³⁵The minutes of this meeting are published. See Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.146-151.

⁵³⁶Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.149.

⁵³⁷For instance, *Geming Wenxian* 50: 349ff.

to take a stronger stance.⁵³⁸ Tang could not but have felt compelled to adopt an uncompromising position on this issue.

The fault, as expected, did not lie with one side alone. The truth was that *both* sides were at this time jockeying for favorable strategic positions before the inspector, Zhang Ruiji, could demarcate their respective zones. The fact that neither Yu nor Chen was in favor of the cease-fire naturally only worsened the situation. To Yu, the war with the North must continue until and unless the goals of *hufa* were realized, and it was simply not sensible to trust the goodwill of Beijing.⁵³⁹ With equally intense passion, Chen viewed the cease-fire with hostility, because he believed it made no sense to stop the war effort at a time when the North was enjoying military superiority. This was especially true when in mid-February Chen's armies scored a number of victories against Yu's troops in Southern Shaanxi.⁵⁴⁰ The Shaanxi situation was further complicated by the fact that there was a widespread problem of banditry in the province. To Chen, and indeed to the Beijing government as a whole, the five-point agreement did not preclude them from attacking the bandits in the province, something which they unapologetically carried on well after the cease-fire.⁵⁴¹ And perhaps not so innocently, Chen must also have known that he stood to benefit from such actions, because many of the bandit groups were actually aligned with the Southern troops in the *hufa* effort. Therefore, while Chen might argue that his deeds were justified, in

⁵³⁸Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 20 February 1919 in Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe zhongduanqian", pp.12-13 (document 14).

⁵³⁹Even Premier Qian recognized that Tang was under a lot of pressure from Yu: see Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 27 February 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.177-178 (document 145).

⁵⁴⁰See Wu Jisun to Zhu Qiqian, 3 March 1919. Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.188 (document 159).

⁵⁴¹See Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 27 February 1919, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.177 (document 145).

Tang's eyes Chen was simply labeling all his opponents as bandits and continuing his war effort against the South under a thin disguise.⁵⁴²

Under these circumstances the person who had the toughest task was Zhu Qiqian. On the one hand, he had to defend the North's position and fend off the vicious attacks from Tang.⁵⁴³ On the other hand, Zhu had the unenviable task of explaining the situation to an annoyed Premier Qian Nengxun, who felt the South was merely playing politics to gain an upper-hand in the negotiations.⁵⁴⁴ Zhu was, above all, disturbed to see the Conference being sidetracked by what he saw as a peripheral matter, and he wanted the discussions to return to the more important issues like the constitution. Tang's tough negotiation style added fuel to the fire. He challenged Zhu to stand his ground and said that since Zhu was a plenipotentiary delegate, he did not necessarily have to listen to his superiors like Premier Qian. To further add to the insult, Tang rather slightly called Premier Qian "a mere clerk in charge of official documents."⁵⁴⁵ In late February, Tang demanded that unless Beijing replaced Chen Shufan, and unless Beijing publicly acknowledged to the foreign powers that it had mishandled the Shaanxi situation, he would discontinue negotiations within forty-eight hours.⁵⁴⁶ This was a drastic move, and even members of the Canton parliament admitted that Tang was taking a far more non-negotiable position than they themselves

⁵⁴²See the minutes of the first meeting of the Conference: Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.149-150.

⁵⁴³This is very obvious when one reads the minutes of the first meeting. Tang's attitude was combative, and at times even insulting.

⁵⁴⁴Qian was obviously impatient with the attitude of Tang: see Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 27 February 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.178 (document 147).

⁵⁴⁵The third meeting of the first session of the Conference: Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.164.

⁵⁴⁶The fifth meeting of the first session of the Conference: Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, pp.181-183.

would have.⁵⁴⁷ Zhu tried to salvage the situation,⁵⁴⁸ but even he himself must have known how difficult this was, not only because Chen Shufan was a powerful general in his own right, but also because an acceptance of the demands would mean a public humiliation of the Northern government.⁵⁴⁹ As a result, barely two weeks after its convention, the Conference was adjourned in the beginning of March.

Premier Qian was understandably very upset. In response to Tang's actions, Qian angrily sent out a public telegram condemning Tang's actions on 6 March, without prior consultation with Zhu.⁵⁵⁰ In this telegram, Qian rebutted Tang's attacks, and rigorously defended Beijing's position in Shaanxi, even though he probably knew very well that Chen did indeed violate the five-point agreement by continuing his attacks after the cease-fire. This telegram was very poorly received by the public,⁵⁵¹ and it above all infuriated Zhu and another key supporter of President Xu, Xiong Xiling, who thought that Qian was putting the peace process at risk.⁵⁵² To lessen the

⁵⁴⁷"Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.74-75 (document 63). In a confidential telegram to the Military government in Canton, Tang admitted that his demands were intended to discredit Beijing, should Beijing fail to meet them and hence discontinue the negotiations: See "Tang Shaoyi diangao 1919-1920", *Jindaishi ziliao*, no.25 (1983), p.166.

⁵⁴⁸Zhu had actually been rather conciliatory and had advised Qian to give ground on several occasions: see Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 26 February 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yiji*, pp.171-172 (document 136).

⁵⁴⁹Premier Qian explained how difficult the situation was in his second telegram of 2 March 1919 to Zhu Qiqian, SHA 1003/845.

⁵⁵⁰See Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yiji*, pp.190-191 (document 165).

⁵⁵¹Tang used the telegram to discredit Qian: see Tang's public telegram on 9 March 1919 in "Tang Shaoyi diangao", pp.134-135.

⁵⁵²Zhu was obviously upset with Qian's actions: see Zhu to Qian on 11 March 1919 in SHA 1003/845. Zhu said that he was originally conducting negotiations with the Southern factions, but Qian's telegram closed this door of opportunity. Xiong sent a telegram to Qian on 10 March 1919 to rebuke him: see Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yiji*, p.195 (document 172).

damage, Zhu privately continued negotiations with Tang after the adjournment, and sought to find a mutually agreeable solution to the question.⁵⁵³

After much discussion, in the end the two sides did come back to the negotiating table in early April. The fact that Inspector Zhang confirmed that there was indeed a serious banditry problem in Shaanxi, and that many of Yu Youren's claims of being attacked had been exaggerated, made it difficult for Tang to continue his hardline policy.⁵⁵⁴ As a result, the South backed down on its insistence on replacing Chen and a public apology from the Northern government. On Beijing's part, Xu was able to exercise his power and stop Chen Shufan from making further advances against the Southern armies. As a result, despite the mutual distrust and the complicated nature of the problem, the delegates, through public as well as private negotiations, were in the end able to come up with a compromise and resolve the problem. The Conference, for the time being at least, survived the first round.

The resumption of the Conference in early April meant that the more important questions of the day, some of which being briefly discussed but none of which close to being resolved in the first session, would now take the center-stage. They included questions relating to the constitution, the balance of power between the civil and the military, and center-province relations, and so on.

⁵⁵³Shen, *Pingzhuhan*, p.446.

⁵⁵⁴See Wang Zuobin ed., "1919 nian nanbei yihe qijian Shaanxi huajie dianwenxuan", *Minguo dangan* (1991:1); Zhang's public telegram on 25 March 1919, p.61 (document 4).

The Question of the Military

Given the fact it was Duan Qirui's forceful revisions of the constitution that sparked off the *hufa* movement, it should not be a surprise that the question of the proper role of the military in the government would be a key item in the agenda of the negotiations. To Sun Yatsen, for instance, China's main problem lay in the fact that the military had for years tried to destroy the foundations of republicanism.⁵⁵⁵ This was why from the inception of the Conference, Sun and his associates had pressed for the "punishment of the culprits who were responsible for the turmoil in the past two years", in other words, Duan Qirui, Xu Shucheng and other military generals. Such a demand was politically useful to Sun: it could drive Xu Shichang and Duan Qirui against each other, and consequently weaken the chances of success for the Conference. Xu was well-aware of the consequences should the Southern delegation insist on this demand. Xu knew that even though Duan was his rival, he was obligated to protect Duan against any possible attack from the South, because or else Xu would be seen as a traitor to the common interests of the military establishment in the North. In any case, Duan for sure would not accept any "punishment" without a fight, and might even be provoked to mount another challenge to Xu's government. This was why Zhu had all along told Tang that it would be impossible for Beijing to accept any "punishment clause". While Xu was conciliatory on many other issues, he had been categorical that this was one of those questions which was non-negotiable for him. As a telegram from Xu's office plainly explained to Zhu, since Xu still depended on Duan's cooperation, there was no way that Duan's position could be touched.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵See for instance, Sun's letter to President Wilson of the United States on 18 November 1918: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:514.

⁵⁵⁶Wu Dingchang to Zhu Qiqian, 21 January 1919: SHA 1003/841.

This was also why when Tang brought up the demand in the second session of the Conference in early April, he met an uncharacteristically hostile Zhu who vehemently refused to discuss the issue.⁵⁵⁷ Zhu argued that the "punishment clause" was a "personal" (*ge-ren*) issue, and so it was inappropriate for it be included as part of the agenda of the Conference.⁵⁵⁸ In fact, Zhu hinted that should Tang refuse to withdraw such demands, Zhu and the Northern delegation would have no choice but to withdraw from the negotiations.⁵⁵⁹ This stubborn attitude probably surprised Tang, who in the end agreed to retract this demand.⁵⁶⁰ The fact that the South backed down this time perhaps also highlighted the dilemma Tang was in regarding his style of negotiations. On the one hand, Tang was under severe pressure from Sun Yatsen and his associates to advance this and other radical demands. On the other hand, Tang fully realized that there was a danger in taking too unyielding a stance in his negotiations. Lu Rongting and the South in general had a vested interest in the success of the Conference, and taking an uncompromising position might in the end only ruin the Conference. As Tang himself acknowledged earlier, should the Conference fail, the biggest beneficiaries would be none other than Duan Qirui and Xu Shucheng, and hence it was imperative that the negotiations not be bogged down.⁵⁶¹ But

⁵⁵⁷See the minutes of the sixth meeting in Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.224.

⁵⁵⁸Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.226.

⁵⁵⁹Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.227.

⁵⁶⁰"Tang Shaoyi diangao", pp.178-179.

⁵⁶¹Tang Shaoyi to Wu Jinglian et.al. on 28 February 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", p.73 (document 60). Some members of the Canton parliament concurred with this view: Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.73 (document 61). In a meeting of the Canton parliament on 20 November 1918, the members also vetoed a proposal to demand all the pro-war generals be dismissed before peace negotiations were to take place. They clearly recognized that this was not possible: see *Geming wenxian* 50:446.

unfortunately for Tang, the conflicting expectations of the various Southern political factions were making life very difficult for him.

If the Southern delegates conceded for the time being that it was practically impossible to punish Duan, they were however still determined to find alternate ways to limit the power of the military, and especially that of Duan. After all, if Duan and his associates were to remain as powerful as they were before, what good would there be to reach a peace agreement? Would Duan not tear apart the settlement as soon as he felt strong enough? Would the Southern provinces not be perpetually under threat even with the peace settlement? This was why the Southern delegates soon turned their attention to the War Participation Army (WPA), created in the wake of China's participation in the World War in the summer of 1917. With the help of Japanese loans, Duan had made the WPA divisions among the best in the nation, and it was soon apparent that the primary use of the WPA was to strengthen Duan's position *vis-a-vis* his domestic opponents, not to fight any external war. It was, indeed, the WPA which formed the bulk of the fighting force in Beijing's campaigns against in the South in 1917 and 1918.⁵⁶² Closely related to the issue of the WPA was the so-called War Participation Loans from Japan concluded in 1918. It is true that the Japanese government had already indicated in December 1918 that it would not, for the time being, lend any more money to the Chinese government, but Tang and his colleagues wanted the Loan to be annulled outright.⁵⁶³ Obviously in Tang's eyes, as long as the WPA existed, the Southern provinces could not but continue to feel threatened.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶²See Lin, *Minba*, pp.192-199.

⁵⁶³See his telegram to Xu Shichang on 22 February 1919 in "Tang Shaoyi diangao", p.130.

⁵⁶⁴See again his telegram to the Canton Military government and parliament on 2 March 1919 in "Tang Shaoyi diangao", pp.132-133.

The Southern delegates were therefore determined to see the *WPA* be disbanded immediately, arguing, and with some reason, that since the World War had already ended, there was no reason for Beijing to sustain the *WPA* divisions anymore.⁵⁶⁵ On this issue there was unity among the Southern delegates, because they all recognized the *WPA* to be a great threat. Zhu and Premier Qian were, however, not ready to concede so easily. Firstly, they argued that since a peace settlement for the World War had not been reached, it would be premature to disband the *WPA*. More importantly, they argued that the *WPA* should not be a topic of discussion in the first place. It was a matter within the prerogatives of the Beijing government, and it was none of the South's business.⁵⁶⁶ Qian promised that upon the conclusion of a peace treaty for the World War, the Beijing government would for sure abolish the War Participation Bureau. But he insisted that it would be at his discretion when it came to the question of whether or not to disband the *WPA*. In fact, he indicated that the divisions of the *WPA* might not even be disbanded, but instead simply be transferred under the control of the Ministry of War after the Versailles Conference.⁵⁶⁷

Beijing's strong resistance against this demand showed how sensitive and difficult the situation was when it came to questions regarding the military. Xu's government still depended on the support of the Northern military generals, and the least it could afford was to appear weak in the peace negotiations. Indeed, even though some military generals and civilian politicians in the North might question

⁵⁶⁵See Tang's telegram to Xu Shichang on 27 February 1919 in "Tang Shaoyi diangao", p.131.

⁵⁶⁶Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 6 March 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.191 (document 165).

⁵⁶⁷Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 21 February 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.153 (document 118)

Duan's behavior in the past two years, it was still unthinkable to sap his authority in the way the South demanded. Furthermore, Duan had already voiced his staunch opposition to any immediate reorganization of the WPA in cabinet meetings beforehand,⁵⁶⁸ and there was the rumor that Xu had promised Duan before he became president that he would not interfere with the administration of the WPA.⁵⁶⁹ Finally, Premier Qian must have been well-aware of the fact that the threat posed by the WPA divisions to the South was one of the reasons why the South came back to the negotiating table in the first place, and naturally he was unwilling to give up this advantage.

But what disturbed Qian the most about Tang's demand was the intentions behind it. Qian was, indeed, suspicious of the possibility that the Southern delegates were merely using this issue as an underhand tactic to attack his government and play him against the military.⁵⁷⁰ This fear was not groundless. In late January and February, in the midst of China's negotiations with the powers in Versailles, Tang had already used other issues to discredit Beijing and score political points. For instance, in early February, he heavily criticized Beijing for its various military agreements with Japan in the two years before.⁵⁷¹ Taking the moral high-ground, Tang claimed that these treaties hurt China's chances at the Versailles Conference, and he went so far as

⁵⁶⁸Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 14 February 1919, SHA 3003/19.

⁵⁶⁹"Wu Jinglian handian cungao", p.89 (document 85).

⁵⁷⁰Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 21 February 1919 SHA 3003/19. Even before the Conference, Wu Jinglian's associates already felt that there was no way Xu could give ground on this issue without arousing the fury of Duan: see Lin Xueheng to Wu Jinglian, 9 January 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yijiu*, p.55 (document 45).

⁵⁷¹See his public telegram to Xu Shichang on 5 February 1919 in Kexueyuan, "Tang Shaoyi diangao", pp.123-124.

to send a public telegram to the Chinese delegation at Paris asking the delegates not to listen to Beijing's orders.⁵⁷² Tang also accused Beijing of having concluded other secret treaties with Japan as well.⁵⁷³

Tang's offensive was two-pronged. On the one hand, his attack was specifically directed against Duan Qirui, the chief architect of the treaties with Japan, even though Tang knew full well that without Duan China would not have participated in the World War in the first place, and certainly would not have enjoyed the current privilege of being a participant in the Versailles Conference. On the other hand, Tang's attack was also more generally targeted at the present Beijing government, because Duan was still part of the present regime. All these actions infuriated Zhu, who felt that Tang was using diplomatic issues to stir up the populace against the Beijing government.⁵⁷⁴ To Qian in particular, these were abominable tactics aimed at scoring political points, pure and simple.⁵⁷⁵ This was also why Qian told Zhu in a private telegram in March that since the demand regarding the WPA was one which was "practically impossible to satisfy",⁵⁷⁶ he would consider it pure bad faith on the part of the South to insist upon this demand.

So the growing schism between the North and the South was caused not only by genuine differences regarding how to tackle the issues at stake, but also by the

⁵⁷²Kexueyuan, "Tang Jiayao diangao", p.125.

⁵⁷³See Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 20 February 1919, SHA 3003/19.

⁵⁷⁴Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 8 February 1919, SHA 3003/19. See also Zhu to Qian 5 February 1919 (second telegram), SHA1003/842.

⁵⁷⁵Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, second telegram on 12 February 1919, SHA 3003/19.

⁵⁷⁶Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 21 February 1919 in Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.153 (document 118).

mutual distrust which had been building up since the beginning of the Conference. This distrust was already well-exposed when in February the Minister of Finance, Gong Xinzhan, announced his intention of issuing some eight-year government bonds to raise revenue to cope with Beijing's difficult financial situation. Immediately Tang and his delegation vehemently protested, arguing that no bonds or loans should be raised before a peace settlement was reached.⁵⁷⁷ It is likely Gong did want to use the money simply to keep government finances afloat, and that he did not have sinister plans to use the newly-raised cash to energize the Northern armies.⁵⁷⁸ But in the eyes of the Southern delegates, the Beijing government was playing an unforgivable double game: negotiating with them on the one hand, but simultaneously bolstering its military position on the other. To Tang, this just demonstrated vividly how little sincerity the Beijing government had toward the negotiations.⁵⁷⁹

What was even more alarming was that the distrust was growing not only between Tang and Zhu, but also between Zhu and Premier Qian as well. As I have said, Zhu was already very disturbed when Qian sent out a public telegram in early March attacking Tang without prior consultation with him. Now the issue of the eight-year bonds added fuel to the fire, because Zhu was again kept in the dark about Gong's plans until it was officially announced. When Zhu was asked by Tang about the bonds in one of the Conference meetings in late February, Zhu had to explain, with much

⁵⁷⁷See the minutes of the third meeting in Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.164.

⁵⁷⁸This was likely to be the case for several reasons. Firstly, as Zhu Qiqian pointed out, it would take some time to retrieve the cash for the bonds, so it would take quite a while before the money could be used for strengthening the armies, if this was indeed why the bonds were issued in the first place. More importantly, the plan seemed to be totally of Gong's making, and in fact members of the Anfu Club were opposed to it. So it seems unlikely that the bonds were part of Duan's plan to strengthen his armies. *Minguo ribao*, 3 April 1919, p.3

⁵⁷⁹Lin, *Minba*, p.205. Also Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.164.

embarrassment, that he did not know the details, and obviously he could do little to defend something which he knew little about.⁵⁸⁰ Zhu became very upset because of this. He argued with Qian that since Beijing would not be able to retrieve the cash for the bonds within a short time in any case, there was no reason why Beijing should not defer the bonds until a peace settlement was reached.⁵⁸¹ Indeed, Zhu openly questioned whether it was wise to issue the bonds, because he believed that they would only arouse the suspicions of the South.⁵⁸²

If all looked gloomy, what was remarkable was that in the end many of these controversies were settled rather satisfactorily by late April. This was possible only because both sides were, at the end of the day, ready to make concessions when they had to. For instance, even though in name the Beijing government still insisted upon its right to issue the eight-year bonds, Minister Gong had in fact indefinitely postponed his plans.⁵⁸³ Again, as I have already mentioned, Tang agreed to retract his demand to insert a "punishment clause" targeted at Duan Qirui into the agenda of the negotiations, because he recognized that there was no way Beijing would back down on this issue. However much the South would like to remove some of the Northern military generals, both Tang and Zhu knew that this was not possible.

⁵⁸⁰See the minutes of the third meeting in Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.164.

⁵⁸¹Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 24 February 1919, Danganguan "Nanbei yihe zhongduanqian", pp.16-17.

⁵⁸²See a report to Wu Jinglian on 26 March 1919 in "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", p.85 (document 80).

⁵⁸³Officially there was no postponement of the bonds, but by April nothing more was heard about them, and apparently Gong was very dejected because he felt this was a big slap on his face. *Minguo ribao*, 3 April 1919, p.3.

But if levying outright punishment on Duan was not possible, the two sides did agree that there was a need to keep the power of the military in check, and they worked together to achieve that goal. For instance, the two sides made substantial progress in their negotiations on issues which would define the future role of the military in national and local politics. After much debate, the two sides were eventually able to agree on the future state of the WPA. Even though Tang was not able to have the WPA disbanded immediately as he would have liked, he and Zhu reached an agreement to introduce a program which would bring about a general reduction of the number of army divisions (*caijun*) in China, including a drastic cut in the divisions of the WPA within a short period of time. The motive behind this program was not only to reduce China's military spending and rescue the future united government from financial bankruptcy, but also to limit the power of the military generals and lower the risk of future military conflicts.⁵⁸⁴ In April, the two sides came to terms on the establishment of a military council which would oversee the different phases of demilitarization. This council, it was agreed, would include an equal number of military generals from both sides. Duan tried to fight the plan, but when he found out that he was not able to, he opted to join the military council instead.⁵⁸⁵

Closely tied to this program, the two sides were furthermore discussing a scheme which would redefine the respective roles of civilian and military institutions, and restore power to civilians at the national as well as the local level. It was

⁵⁸⁴See Xu's interview with the press in *Minguo Ribao*, 4 March 1919, p.6. See the two telegrams of Zhu to Qian Nengxun: 15 April 1919, Zhongguo dier lishi danganguan ed., "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou Zhu Qiqian yu Qian Nengxun deng laiwang midianxuan". *Minguo dangan*, (1986:2), pp.5-6; 16 April 1919, p.6.

⁵⁸⁵Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 16 April 1919 in Dierdang, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", p.6. See also Zhu to Wu Dingchang, 17 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyiji*, pp.238-239 (document 262); Zhu Qiqianto Li Chun, 17 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyiji*, pp.239-240 (document 263).

suggested that the power of the military generals in provincial administrations, as symbolized by the so-called "military governorship (*dujun*) system", should be checked, and that civilian officials should now instead be the main decision-makers within the province.⁵⁸⁶ The discussions were still, it must be conceded, on a very superficial level on the eve of the break-up of the Conference.⁵⁸⁷ What is important, however, is the fact that while one may expect the military to be bitterly opposed to this plan, Xu was surprisingly able to push some military generals to endorse such proposals, and have them publicly announced their belief that military personnel should not be involved in civil administration.⁵⁸⁸ So at least on matters regarding the military, despite their differences, and despite their mutual distrust and misunderstandings, the North and the South were making remarkable progress and working out many of their differences.

The Question of Center-Province Relations

As I have described in chapter three, one of the reasons why the South wanted negotiations with Beijing was that regional warlords like Lu Rongting and Tang Jiyao believed that it was in their interest to submit to central authority. The war with Beijing in 1917-1918 had totally ruined the finances of their provinces, and the beneficiaries of the situation were, as Lu and Tang found out, their enemies and not

⁵⁸⁶See the minutes of the sixth meeting in Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, pp.224-229.

⁵⁸⁷See Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 21 February 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, pp.246-247 (document 273).

⁵⁸⁸See the public telegrams by a large group of military generals in 1060/70(2); 1029/171(2). Even Yu Youren was impressed by the fact that Northern military generals were supporting such proposals: see Yu Youren's public telegram of 5 May 1919 in SHA 1029/176(2).

themselves. Not surprisingly, one of their key goals in the Conference was to reestablish their relationship with Beijing. In retrospect, what they were asking for was not at all a new framework which would redefine center-province relations, but rather a mechanism to turn the clock back to 1916. They were hoping to return to what I would call "1916 system", under which on the one hand the center legitimized the regional warlords and granted them generous financial support, while on the other the regional warlords acknowledged Beijing's authority, and allowed Beijing be part of the decision-making process in their regions.⁵⁸⁹

To be sure, the financial support the Southern provinces were seeking this time was far greater than they had ever demanded before. This was partly because there was a genuine financial crisis in the South, as Lu and Tang badly needed large sums of money to keep their near-bankrupt provincial administrations afloat. On top of this, they also needed the financial resources to disband the soldiers they conscripted in their campaigns in the previous months.⁵⁹⁰ Lu had obviously learnt from his experience with the Yunnan Army that it was dangerous to keep troops which were poorly provided within one's administration, and therefore, he wholeheartedly supported the program to disband soldiers, especially those whose loyalty to him was at best suspect. But the most important reason why the South was asking for more than ever before was that they knew they could afford to. Fully realizing that Xu Shichang was desperate for peace, they knew they were in a very strong position to bargain. Since there would surely be new parliamentary elections and perhaps even the election of a new vice-president after the Conference, they figured that the more

⁵⁸⁹See chapter three for details and my explanation of the "1916 system".

⁵⁹⁰See the intelligence report submitted to Zhu Qiqian, SHA 3003/26. See also Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 14 April 1919, SHA 1003/846.

financial resources they could exact from Beijing, the stronger they would be in the upcoming political campaigns.⁵⁹¹

On principle Beijing did not oppose to returning to the "1916 system" or using financial aid as an incentive for the Southern provinces to renounce their independence. To be sure, Premier Qian did cynically remark that the Southern warlords would probably use the money primarily to strengthen their own armies instead of disbanding troops,⁵⁹² but Xu had also privately told Zhu that in order to achieve peace as soon as possible, Zhu should not hesitate to dangle out financial incentives to the Southern provinces.⁵⁹³ What is worthy of our attention is the fact that the ill-will we associate with the negotiations over other issues, such as the disposal of the WPA, was curiously absent in this area of discussion. Since Beijing was itself financially impoverished at this point as well, the way in which Beijing intended to raise the cash for its aid to the South as well as for post-war reconstruction was to contract a large loan from the foreign consortium. This was, in many ways, an ingenious stroke on the part of Xu and Zhu. Since it was obvious that the foreign powers would not agree to lend China any money unless China restored its unity, the prospect of the loan would give the South an added incentive to iron out its differences with Beijing as soon as possible. The powers, on their part, would probably find it difficult to refuse the loan, not only because they knew the success or failure of the loan would highly influence the outcome of the Peace Conference, but also because a

⁵⁹¹This was indeed Zhu Qiqian's worry: Zhu to Qian Nengxun, 22 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", p.10.

⁵⁹²Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 10 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.233 (document 246).

⁵⁹³Wu Dingchang to Zhu Qiqian, 8 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.230 (document 240); Wu Dingchang to Zhu Qiqian, 9 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiuyijiuyi*, p.231 (document 243).

refusal would make a mockery of the concern they said they had over China's continued civil strife. And once the powers were involved in the loan, Xu must have thought, they would have every incentive to further ensure that the peace settlement would work out, and that China would be engaged in civil strife no more.

So one of the main tasks facing Zhu and Tang in the months of March and April was to work out the fine points of the loan. The delegates spent a substantial amount of time analyzing the financial details: from matters such as how large a loan would the powers be willing to grant, to what kind of interest rate would the Chinese government be able to afford, to how the future government should pay up for the loan.⁵⁹⁴ After meticulous calculations and some debate, the delegates finally agreed on a sum of 200 million yuan. Of this sum, about 40 to 50 million would be set aside for the purposes of building railways. About 50 to 60 million would be spent on paying off soldiers and disbanding them, and another 27 million would be paid to the war-torn provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hunan, Fujian and Shaanxi for reconstruction. It was also tentatively agreed that the remainder of the loan, which amounted to about 70 million, would be given to the Southern provinces to rebuild their finances. This was actually a smaller sum than the 100 million the South was looking for, but was nonetheless a substantial amount by any standard. Attached to this agreement was a promise from the South that it would not use the aid package to strengthen or enlarge its armies.⁵⁹⁵ In return for the aid, Beijing resumed

⁵⁹⁴See the various documents in Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", pp.7-10.

⁵⁹⁵See Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 22 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", pp.9-10.

its authority over the Southern armies, and on paper at least, reclaimed overall control of the Southern armies.⁵⁹⁶

This tentative agreement infuriated the military, and even Jin Yunpeng, the Minister of War who was supposed to be Xu's ally, now joined hands with Duan Qirui to block the plan.⁵⁹⁷ Yet despite the vehement opposition of Duan and his associates, Zhu and Qian were apparently not fearful of the possibility that this deal would fall through. As even the Southern delegates indicated privately, the two sides had effectively come to an agreement over most of the terms.⁵⁹⁸ Zhu was in fact so confident on this issue that he was analyzing whether it would be possible for the two sides to sign on this agreement separately, even should negotiations on other questions break down. What Zhu did worry about, however, were the negotiations over the constitutional question,⁵⁹⁹ and this is where we will turn to in the following section.

The Question of the Constitution

Even before the Conference began, it was already generally recognized that the question over the constitution (*xianfa* or *falu*) would be the issue that would make or break the negotiations. After all, it was Duan Qirui's refusal to reconvene the old

⁵⁹⁶See Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 22 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", p.10. Exactly how much control the center would have was difficult to say, but the balance of power was probably along the lines of the 1916 system.

⁵⁹⁷Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 27 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", p.11.

⁵⁹⁸CCER, 30 April 1919.

⁵⁹⁹Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 29 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", p.11.

parliament in July 1917, and the establishment of a rival parliament in Canton in September 1917, which sparked off the civil war in the past eighteen months in the first place. In retrospect, it was perhaps not surprising that this issue was as explosive as it was. Any effort to reconcile two rivalling parliaments competing for legitimacy was bound to be difficult in any country, not just in China. The law and the constitution were at stake, and politicians were keenly aware of the fact that the failure to resolve the question satisfactorily would seriously undermine the basis of the young Republic. They knew they had to create a settlement which would preserve the continuity of the Republic and restore its credibility after what happened in the past eighteen months. They also knew that they had to come up with solutions to the long-standing constitutional problems of the Republic, such as how power should be shared within the government, and how constitutional rule should work out in practice.

Furthermore, Chinese leaders and politicians were also acutely aware of the fact that the terms of settlement on this issue would define not only how politics would be played in the forthcoming years, but also who the main players would be. If the Northern parliament was to be retained, then one can safely assume that Northern politicians and militarists like Duan Qirui would continue to dominate parliamentary politics. On the other hand, a restoration of the old parliament would probably mean the reemergence of Sun Yatsen and the radicals, if not actually the kind of factional politics which had paralyzed the government administration in 1916-1917. And one is literally talking about the livelihood and political future of thousands of politicians being at stake here. Should the old parliament be restored, then hundreds of members of the Beijing parliament would lose their jobs and power basis, and *vice versa*. Viewed from this perspective, one will be able to appreciate why that the

constitutional question would draw such uncharacteristic passion from politicians across the political spectrum at this time.

Xu himself must have been well aware of how sensitive the situation was, and that if handled improperly, the question could seriously undermine his regime. The task in front of him was formidable, especially because he had to attain goals which were not at all times compatible. On the one hand, for instance, he knew his authority in government would be greatly strengthened if he could resolve the constitutional question, yet on the other he also realized that the debate on the parliamentary problem would inevitably lead to questions regarding the legitimacy not only of the Beijing parliament, but also of his own presidency, since it was the Beijing parliament which elected him in the first place. And so Xu was often forced to dance on the thin line of promoting constitutional negotiations on the hand, but keeping a close check on the agenda of the discussions on the other.⁶⁰⁰ This was, as one may expect, a task not easy to accomplish at all. In the same vein, Xu knew he needed a settlement which would be attractive enough to persuade the Southern provinces to give up their independence and the *hufa* movement, yet he also knew very well that if he conceded too much, he would arouse the anger of his military and parliamentary colleagues in Beijing.

This perhaps explains why Xu had already made very thorough investigations on the political climate of both the North and the South even before he became president. He knew he needed to know what he might need to concede to the South, as well as how much he could afford to concede, given the volatile situation in the North. The picture in the North was clear enough. Duan Qirui was naturally opposed to any

⁶⁰⁰This was very apparent from what Xu told Wu Jinglian's associates: see Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.103-104 (document 108).

settlement with the South, because it was he who refused to reconvene the old parliament and made the constitutional revisions in 1917-1918 in the first place. Likewise, members of the Beijing parliament were determined to block any compromise with the South which would undermine the legitimacy of their institution. But what probably worried Xu the most was the political situation in the South. Xu seemed to be confident about his ability in pushing any settlement through his military and parliamentary colleagues.⁶⁰¹ After all, if he was successful earlier in launching the peace effort despite the staunch opposition of the military, why could he not do so again? But the situation in the South was a far greater cause for concern. What Xu feared the most was scenario in which the South took an uncompromising stance toward the constitutional question and hence bogged down the negotiations.⁶⁰² If this was to happen, Xu's government would be in dire straits, because this would send his enemies in Beijing ample ammunition to attack him. To Xu, therefore, it was imperative for Xu to command beforehand a good understanding of the nature of the demands the Southern leaders might present, and if possible, even reach an informal understanding with the Southern leaders before the Conference began.

This was why well before the Conference started, Xu had already sent out a number of secret agents to the South to investigate the political climate of the South on the one hand, and to discuss the various issues related to the constitution and the

⁶⁰¹ At least he was trying to appear confident: see *Shibao*, 7 April 1919, p.2. Sun Zhong to Wu Jinglian, 3 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.91-92 (document 89); Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.103-104 (document 108).

⁶⁰² This was why he wanted assurances from the moderate parliamentarians of Canton that if he was to grant concessions, they would return the favor: Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", p.104 (document 108).

parliament with the regional factional leaders on the other.⁶⁰³ The fact that most of the south's factions agreed to be part of the Peace Conference and negotiate on the constitutional question was already indicative of the South's rejection of Sun Yatsen's position of "no negotiation and no compromise". This was, in itself, a major concession from the South. As Sun Yatsen himself admitted, any negotiations with the "illegitimate" Beijing government on equal footing could not but be a compromise of the legitimacy of the Canton government.⁶⁰⁴ Indeed, the Southern factions must have been well-aware of the fact that the chance that Beijing would simply back down completely and restore the old parliament and abolish its own assembly was basically non-existent. So the fact that they were still ready to take part in the negotiations strongly indicates the fact that they were ready to make concessions on their part as well. This was precisely why Sun Yatsen was so distressed when he knew that his own government and parliament had agreed to participate in the Conference. As he predicted, and quite correctly, his goals of *hufa* were surely going to be compromised by the Conference.⁶⁰⁵

Despite the fact that the South had now shown its willingness to negotiate on the constitutional question, Xu and Zhu Qinglan approached the Conference with a great deal of care, because they knew the question was going to involve complicated negotiations. The negotiations were not made any easier by the fact that Tang Shaoyi, as Zhu already found out, was increasingly under the spell of Sun Yatsen on this

⁶⁰³See the various reports in SHA 1003/786.

⁶⁰⁴*Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:531. The radical Sun Hungyi agreed on this as well: see his letter to Wu Jinglian, 14 December 1918, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.33-35 (document 32).

⁶⁰⁵*Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:529.

issue.⁶⁰⁶ Tang was under immense pressure from Sun and the radicals to be combative over this question, and in Zhu's view, Tang's weak character made him vulnerable to this kind of pressure.⁶⁰⁷ So in order to ensure that the debate on the constitution would not overshadow other important issues, Zhu, with the consent of Tang, postponed discussions on the constitutional question to the end of the Conference and until all other matters in the agenda were by and large settled. Zhu feared, and quite rightly, that once the delegates started to debate on the parliamentary question, temper would run so high as to make the discussion of other issues impossible.⁶⁰⁸ This was why even though Zhu and Tang did briefly touch on the topic in February and March, they did not start to seriously explore the question until April. This was also why when they did start to conduct negotiations on the topic, they had to do it behind closed doors. Knowing how potentially explosive the issue was, Zhu and Tang realized that they must be able to agree among themselves before they presented their proposal for public scrutiny.

Judging from the materials found in his personal archives in the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, there were no lack of proposals submitted to Zhu Qinglan regarding what kind of constitutional settlement China needed.⁶⁰⁹ One might expect the simple restoration of the status quo of 1917 to be among the more prominent of them, but this was in fact not the case. Turning back the clock to June

⁶⁰⁶Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 11 January 1919, SHA 1003/841. This explains why even Sun himself said that Tang had taken the right stance in the negotiations: see his letter on 6 March 1919, *Guofu quanji*, 5:127-128.

⁶⁰⁷See Zhu Qiqian to Wu Dingchang, 13 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yiji*, p.234 (document 250); Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian 18 January 1919, p.243 (document 268).

⁶⁰⁸Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun 10 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", pp.3-4.

⁶⁰⁹Zhu had compiled a list of the proposals: SHA 3003/6.

1917 was unacceptable not only to Duan Qirui and the militarists, but also to Xu and Zhu as well. First of all, the sweeping away of all the constitutional changes introduced after July 1917 would suggest that all those changes were in fact unconstitutional. In that case, a shadow of illegitimacy would be cast upon Xu's presidency as well, because Xu was elected by a Beijing parliament based upon the new rules after July 1917. And if the old parliament was back, should former President Li Yuanhong not be brought back as well?⁶¹⁰

Even more importantly, and as I have argued in chapter one, the reason why Duan introduced the changes which he did was precisely because he believed that the constitutional system was *not* working well in 1916-1917. Would turning back the clock not bring back all the turmoil of 1916-1917 as well? This fear was widely shared. One of Xu's associates, for instance, pointed out that restoring the status quo of June 1917 would merely restore the deadly factional rivalries and power struggle between the executive and the legislative. As he said, what China needed was a permanent solution to the constitutional question.⁶¹¹ So the constitutional question was not only about resolving the question of the two parliaments: it was also about building a new foundation for the Republic so that what happened in 1916-1917 would not be repeated.

⁶¹⁰Xu's fear of losing his own presidency was very evident: see Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.103-104 (document 108).

⁶¹¹SHA 1003/777. The letter, addressed to Xu's secretary Wu Shixiang, was, actually written on 21 May 1919, after the break-up of the Conference, but such ideas must have been well-circulated in Xu's circles before that. Unfortunately we do not know who this person was, but judging from the contents of the letter, he was a close friend of Xu's group.

What may surprise us is that even Sun Yatsen was in fact not in favor of turning back the clock either. As I have said, even though Sun's campaign was entitled *hufa*, it was in fact not a *defensive* campaign intended simply to return to the pre-July 1917 days. This could be vividly demonstrated over the question of the restoration of the old parliament. To be sure, Sun did insist that Duan Qirui's revisions in 1917-1918 were unconstitutional, and that the old parliament be restored before any settlement should be reached. But what *exactly* did he mean by this? One must be aware of the fact that when Sun talked about the old parliament, he was actually referring to the *current* old parliament in Canton, which was in name but not in fact the parliament of 1917.⁶¹² Upon Duan's refusal to reconvene the old parliament of 1916-1917, Sun Yatsen formed the Canton parliament, but only about one hundred and twenty members, out of more than eight hundred members of the 1917 parliament, came down to join him. Sun lobbied hard for more members to join his cause, but he had little success.⁶¹³ This created a serious problem for Sun, because without a quorum, and with the majority of the members of the 1917 parliament standing by the wayside, the legitimacy of his *hufa* movement was in great jeopardy.

As a result, and as a last resort to increase the membership of the parliament, the Canton military government disqualified those who failed to come down by the summer of 1918, and replaced them with candidates who came second in their districts

⁶¹²When one reads the documents at this time, one will find that the term "the old parliament" was often used indiscriminately to refer to both the 1917 parliament and the Canton parliament.

⁶¹³Sun was not able to increase the number of MPs. and in fact many of them left Canton after a few months. CCER, 5 September 1917; 25 October 1917.

in the 1913 election.⁶¹⁴ This measure was greeted with considerable success, and within a few months the number of members in the Canton parliament more than doubled. But the problem was that this measure was not only of doubtful legality, but it also turned the Canton parliament into an assembly consisting primarily of members who did not belong to the 1917 parliament.⁶¹⁵ This was why during the Conference many members of the Canton parliament were actually opposed to restoring the old (1917) parliament, because many of them would lose their jobs should that happen.⁶¹⁶ And Sun himself found it hard to stomach the restoration of the 1917 parliament as well, and for obvious reasons. Most of the members of the 1917 parliament had, in Sun's eyes, betrayed the cause of *hufa* by failing to come down to Canton. If they were true republicans, how could they have done that?

A further reason why Sun was opposed to turning the clock back was that Sun himself also recognized that the constitutional system as it stood in 1917 was not working well. His antidote for the problem, however, was drastically different from that of Xu or the militarists. If Xu and many other politicians felt that the 1917 parliament had overstepped its responsibility by constantly challenging the decisions of the executive, Sun felt quite the contrary. In fact, he believed that the powers of the parliamentary institution should be expanded in any future constitutional settlement. He argued that it was of cardinal importance that the parliament "be able to exercise its

⁶¹⁴*Minguo ribao*, 20 July 1918, p.6. Registers of the election results were kept in each secondary electoral district, and what the Canton government did was to replace those who failed to come down with those who came second in their respective districts.

⁶¹⁵Zhang, Wu Jinglian, p.146.

⁶¹⁶*Minguo ribao*, 14 May 1919, p.2. There were around 150 "supplementary" members by April 1919: *Shuntian shibao*, 19 April 1919, p.2.

authority freely".⁶¹⁷ The fact that Sun wanted the future parliament to be more involved in the decision-making process than even its 1917 predecessor is apparent in a letter of his in late December 1918.⁶¹⁸ In this letter, Sun explained that all he demanded was that the future parliament be able to exercise its prerogatives freely, *because* once it was able to do so, it would be able to assume *sole* responsibility over matters like demilitarization, punishment of those responsible for the present crisis, abolition of the *dujun* system and so on. What is telling is Sun's assumption that the parliament *alone* would deal with these matters, and the fact that he made no reference to the executive being part of the decision-making process at all. Indeed, what previous historians have neglected is the fact that Sun did not merely want the restoration of the Canton parliament. Rather, he wanted future parliaments to be the dominant component in the government structure, something not stipulated in the Provisional Constitution of 1912 and arguably even contrary to its spirit. Furthermore, learning from the experience of 1917 in which the parliament was dissolved by President Li Yuanhong against its will, Sun above all wanted a stipulation that would allow the parliament to be in session as long as it wished, and that no one could order its dissolution without the members' prior consent.⁶¹⁹ Going back to 1917 was clearly not good enough for Sun: he wanted a new constitutional arrangement in which the power locus would lie in the parliament.

⁶¹⁷See Sun's letter to the Canton parliament on 5 December 1919, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:521.

⁶¹⁸See his letter to Xu Chongzhi on 23 December 1918: *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 4:526-527.

⁶¹⁹See *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 5:60-61. This is very significant, because this was something clearly not stipulated in the 1912 Provisional Constitution. So it just shows once again that Sun was not merely protecting the Provisional Constitution, but was in fact trying to create a new constitutional arrangement.

So the 1917 days were gone and gone for good, and the negotiators in Shanghai must now work to frame a new system which would not only be acceptable to most, if not all, factions, in the North and the South, but one which they believed would provide a firm constitutional basis of the young Republic to operate on in the years to come. There were a variety of proposals put forward by members of parliament, politicians, bureaucrats, and so on. One of them, for instance, suggested that the Beijing parliament be kept but enlarged to incorporate members of the Canton parliament. Then the newly combined parliament should quickly draft a new constitution and be dissolved, and new elections based on the permanent constitution should follow. But this proposal ran into trouble as soon as it was put forward. First of all, if the two parliaments were to be combined, then the number of members of parliament would be too large for anything to be done. Furthermore, as many northern politicians pointed out, since there were essentially only five provinces in the South, to combine the two parliaments would disproportionately represent the Southern provinces. Most importantly of all, the Southern provinces bitterly opposed the plan because it was their parliamentary members who had to join the Beijing members, not the other way round.⁶²⁰

More promising was the proposal calling for the simultaneous dissolution of the Beijing and Canton parliaments. There were two variations of this proposal. One of them called for new elections based on the electoral rules before Duan's revisions in 1917-1918. The new parliament would then be responsible for drafting a permanent constitution.⁶²¹ The other called for the selection of members from both parliaments

⁶²⁰Wang Shuhuai, "Guohui wenti yu nanbei hehui", *Zhongguo jindai xiandaishi lunji* vol.21. p.159.

⁶²¹SHA 1003/77.

for the purposes of revising the electoral laws and drafting a permanent constitution. New elections would then follow. In both cases, Xu would remain as president after the new elections.⁶²² There were many strengths to this plan, whichever version one might be referring to. Firstly, since both parliaments would be dissolved simultaneously, it would not be seen as a defeat on either side. Furthermore, both of these versions advocated a quick completion of the permanent constitution, which hopefully would clear up all the ambiguities of the Provisional Constitution of 1912. It is true that this plan might offer little comfort to those who, like Sun Yatsen, believed that the Canton parliament must be kept. But political analysts would be quick to point out that there were strong constitutional arguments for a simultaneous dissolution of the two parliaments, even granted, for argument's sake, that Duan's revisions in 1917-1918 were indeed unconstitutional. This was not only because many members of the Canton parliament were not, as I have explained earlier, actually members of the 1917 parliament in the first place. The problem was that even for those who were, it was doubtful whether they should have the right to continue their service. This was because these members had served in the parliament since 1913, and therefore even discounting the years when the parliament was dissolved, many of them would still have served their terms in full by this time.⁶²³ So why was it so wrong to hold new elections, which would probably help to re legitimize the young Republic?⁶²⁴

⁶²²See Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian 18 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.243 (document 268).

⁶²³The tenure of a House Representative was four years. The tenure of a Senator was six years, but many of the Senators we are dealing with here actually had only 4-year terms or even 2-year terms. According to the Provisional Constitution, there should be elections for one-third of the seats in the Senate once every two years. Since this was the very first Senate, some senators in this particular Senate had to have shorter terms to make the above provision possible. See the relevant sections of Qian, *Jidu*.

⁶²⁴This was indeed the point made by Lu Rongting and others, in their telegram to the Canton Military government, 11 June 1919 in *Geming wenxian* 50: 426-427.

Not surprisingly, Sun's opposition to these plans was probably motivated as much by lofty principles as by political self-interest. One has to remember that 1913 was the high point of Guomindang's popularity, and that the party enjoyed sweeping success in the national elections. It is true that many Guomindang members could no longer be counted upon as loyal followers of Sun Yatsen by this time,⁶²⁵ but a restoration of the old parliament, whether it was the 1917 version or the current Canton version, could at least ensure Sun's prominence in high politics in the years to come. On the other hand, it would be disastrous for Sun should this proposal be adopted, and new elections be held, because Sun could not possibly hope to do well in any new elections. The Anfu machinery has already shown how the wealth of northern politicians could easily translate into electoral success. It was, indeed, nearly certain that it would be Xu and his allies, not Sun, who would emerge triumphant in the elections.⁶²⁶ And as one of Xu's representatives in the Canton military government, Xu Qian, remarked earlier, once Xu Shichang was entrenched in his position, it would be very difficult to dislodge him from power.⁶²⁷

This was why Sun would put immense pressure on Tang over this issue,⁶²⁸ because it was in Sun's interest to see the Conference fail than to reach a settlement not

⁶²⁵The problems for Sun are in this respect are very well-told in Friedman, *Backward*.

⁶²⁶Some of Sun's associates were hoping that Sun would regain the presidency, and obviously the success of the Conference would not help. See the tract written by Xiao Ganfei entitled "The Preparatory Materials Our Party Need for the North-South Peace Conference" in *Geming wenxian* 50:428-430. Zhang Binglin also said explicitly that should the Conference succeed, Xu would be in a commanding position: "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.57-58 (document 47).

⁶²⁷Xu Qian to Sun Yatsen, 10 December 1919, Dangshihui, 413/36.

⁶²⁸Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, 1919 vol.2 no.1, p.45 (document 55). Some of Sun's associates clearly wanted Tang to take as strong a stance as possible. They also wanted to make sure that should the Conference

favorable to him. According to Zhu Qiqian, Tang was so fearful of the attack of the radicals that despite his plenipotentiary status, he often refused to make any concrete commitments in the negotiations. Instead, he chose to defer many of his decisions to the Military government back in Canton.⁶²⁹ Ironically, Sun found himself unlikely allies in his opposition against the proposals at the opposite end of the political spectrum: Duan Qirui and the Anfu parliament. In mid-April, rumors were surfacing that Duan was trying to organize a military conference in Tianjin in an effort to assert himself.⁶³⁰ His allies in the Beijing parliament also started to clamor against any proposal which might dissolve their institution and cost them their jobs. Earlier in the month Anfu Club members had already gathered together and announced that they would neither accept the proposals I outlined above, nor approve of any agreement reached in Shanghai which they believed was unconstitutional.⁶³¹ Now they began even to publicly attack Premier Qian and Zhu. They angrily questioned Zhu's authority in carrying out negotiations over the constitutional question, and threatened to impeach Qian's administration.⁶³²

But Xu and Premier Qian remained undaunted amidst such attack. Qian in fact rebutted the attack of the Anfu Club members in late April, insisting that his

fail, it would be Beijing which would appear to have been responsible for the failure: see the letter by Lin Xiumei to Sun Yatsen, 16 April 1919, *Geming wenxian* 50:423-424. To make things even more difficult for the negotiations, Sun asked his associates in the South to step up military preparations: See Sun Yatsen to Yang Xianyi, 19 April 1919, *Dangshihui* 049/103 vol.2, pp.88-89 (document no.62)

⁶²⁹See an undated letter by Zhu Qinglan in SHA 1003/784; see also Tang's telegram to the Military government on 16 April 1919, "Tang Jiyao diangao", p.180

⁶³⁰CCER, 16 April 1919.

⁶³¹*Shibao*, 14 April 1919, p.2.

⁶³²For the text see Nanhai Renzi, "Anfu huoguoji", *Jindai Baihai*, 4:464-465; *Minguo Ribao*, 21 April 1919, p.3.

administration did have the right to discuss constitutional issues.⁶³³ Indeed, Xu was apparently confident that he could push through any settlement, and his only fear seemed to be the possibility that the South would remain uncompromising. In order to soften the South's "resistance", Xu had already been lavishing large financial rewards to endear himself to leaders of the various Southern factions. In particular, through the help of a member of the Canton parliament named Zhang Han, Xu literally tried to buy the loyalty of the members of the Canton parliament and the Guomindang, sometimes with success, sometimes not.⁶³⁴ What was rather incredible was the fact that Xu went so far as to try to bribe Tang Shaoyi, although Tang solemnly refused.⁶³⁵ Xu's agents also tried to solicit the support of Sun's more moderate followers, like Wang Jingwei, and hoped to convince members of the Canton parliament through Wang that it was in their interests to come to terms with Beijing. Xu promised them support in their future election campaigns, and hoped that this would reduce their fear of losing their seats in the present parliament.⁶³⁶ Perhaps most surprisingly, Xu was privately giving indications that he might even be willing to temporarily restore the 1917 parliament for the specific purpose of drafting a permanent constitution, provided that he could remain as president.⁶³⁷

⁶³³For the text, see Nanhai, "Anfu", p.467.

⁶³⁴This Zhang Han had worked for Xu Shichang in Manchuria before. He suggested to Xu that if Xu gave him half a million yuan, he would be able to buy the loyalty of more than a hundred Canton parliamentary members: see SHA 1003/786. See also SHA 1003/781, which includes an intelligence report written by a Shanghai agent on 14 March 1919 who felt that the money spent was not producing the results. Some of Sun's associates were clearly disturbed by Xu's bribery campaign: see Fang Jingdong to Sun Yatsen, 12 January 1919, *Geming Wenxian* 50:420.

⁶³⁵Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 10 April 1919, SHA 3003/4. See also Zhu's memoirs, SHA 3003/1.

⁶³⁶Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 11 March 1919, SHA 1003/845.

⁶³⁷See Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919, "Wu Jinglian handian cungao". pp.103-104 (document 108). According to Liang Shiyi, Xu was indeed willing to give in on any demand as long as he could remain as president: Cen. *Liang* 2:43.

All this effort of Xu was clearly paying off, because moderate parliamentarians like Wu Jinglian were starting to believe that they could indeed come to terms with Xu. Thinking that they had little chance of defeating the North militarily, they felt that Xu was the person who could offer them the most favorable terms under the circumstances.⁶³⁸ Strangely enough, they now felt that they *needed* Xu to remain in power, because the alternative would be either Duan Qirui or Cao Kun. This was why in March Xu could even threaten to resign in an attempt to force the South to soften its stance.⁶³⁹ Xu now realized that they needed him as much as he needed them.

On the eve of the break-up of the Conference in May, therefore, there was every indication that a settlement was about to be reached on the constitutional question, although the precise terms were yet to be ironed out. The eventual settlement might involve the simultaneous dissolution of the two parliaments followed by new elections. The eventual settlement might involve the restoration of the 1917 parliament for the drafting of a permanent constitution, which would then have to be approved by members of the Beijing parliament. It is in this context that we can understand why the leader of the Anfu parliament, Wang Yitang, was beginning to concede in mid-April that the simultaneous dissolution of the two parliaments might be acceptable, even if this meant the dissolution of his very own institution.⁶⁴⁰ In fact, some Anfu Club members went so far as to say that they could accept a settlement

⁶³⁸ Yang Shizhe to Wu Jinglian, 29 April 1919. "Wu Jinglian handian cungao", pp.103-104 (document 108).

⁶³⁹ CCER, 22 March 1919.

⁶⁴⁰ *Shibao*, 16 April 1919, p.1.

which would abolish the Beijing parliament and yet preserve the Canton parliament, provided they would be compensated accordingly on other issues.⁶⁴¹

It is also in this context, I believe, that we can understand why members of both parliaments were starting to gather together in Shanghai from mid-April onward in an attempt to formulate a settlement of their own making. Members of the Anfu parliament were, ironically, among the most active in the effort to find an agreement, even though this might mean the dissolution of their own institution. Conceding that a settlement was inevitable, members of the Anfu parliament would rather see themselves being the architects of the future settlement than Zhu or Tang. As one commentator remarked, the members felt that it was better to "commit suicide" by working out a deal among themselves, than to be "executed" by Zhu and Tang who were about to dictate terms to them.⁶⁴²

Likewise, members of the Canton parliament were leaving Canton *en masse* to ensure that they themselves would be involved in drafting the settlement.⁶⁴³ According to one report, there were as many as 200 members of the Canton parliament in Shanghai, despite the repeated pleas from Guangdong that they should return, and despite the fact that their absence made it impossible for the Canton parliament to function properly. Many of these members were evidently prepared to come to terms

⁶⁴¹ *Minguo ribao*, 24 April 1919, p.3.

⁶⁴² *Shibao*, 16 April 1919, p.2; 26 April 1919, p.2; 29 April 1919, p.2. Especially the article of 26 April 1919.

⁶⁴³ See Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, 1919 vol.2 no.1, p.52 (document 62). Tang Shaoyi was obviously worried by the mass exodus from Canton to Shanghai of the Southern parliamentary members: See his telegram to the Canton parliament on 7 April 1919. "Tang Shaoyi diangao", pp.140-141. See also Zhang, *Wu Jinglian*, p.154.

with their Northern counterparts.⁶⁴⁴ Members of the two parliaments were essentially debating between two possible solutions. Either they were to establish a national assembly with the specific duty of drafting the constitution, with its membership including members of both parliaments as well as eminent Chinese politicians.⁶⁴⁵ Or they would simply restore the 1917 parliament in Nanjing for the sole purpose of completing the permanent constitution, a proposal similar to the one discussed by the delegations in Shanghai.⁶⁴⁶ Naturally the Beijing parliament was more reluctant to see the latter happen, but there were signs that they might just be willing to accept that.⁶⁴⁷

The very success of these negotiations is also vividly reflected by how disillusioned Sun and the radicals were with the current situation by late April. It is no coincidence that the pro-Sun newspaper, *Minguo ribao*, would issue in its front page a strong condemnation of the Canton parliamentary members who were trying to come to terms with the North at this time,⁶⁴⁸ because it realized that an agreement which would compromise the ideals of *hufa* was not far away. In late April, indeed, Sun was lamenting the fact that all was lost for him, and that "no one except Hu Hanmin was

⁶⁴⁴See *Shibao*, 12 April 1919, p.1; 23 April 1919, p.2. It was very apparent to contemporaries that a compromise was about to be reached: see *Shuntian shibao*, 24 April 1919, p.2. Zhu Qiqian was in fact not thrilled by these negotiations, and said that "the harm they created would be great". He did not explicitly explain why, but it is clear that he realized that if the parliamentary members came to terms on their own, both he and the Beijing government would not be able to control the terms the parliamentary members might come to. See Qian Nengxun to Zhu Qiqian, 30 April 1919, Kexueyuan, *Yijiu yiji*, pp.251-252 (document 283). Xu was apparently worried that the parliamentary members might reach a settlement which did not guarantee his presidency: see Gaimusho, *Bunsho*, 1919 vol.2 no.1, pp.52-53. (document 62).

⁶⁴⁵*Shuntian shibao*, 28 April 1919, p.2; *Minguo ribao*, 24 April 1919, p.3.

⁶⁴⁶*Shuntian shibao*, 22 April 1919, p.2.

⁶⁴⁷See *Minguo ribao*, 24 April 1919, p.3.

⁶⁴⁸*Minguo ribao*, 23 April 1919, p.2.

fighting the North on the parliamentary question". Indeed, Sun's hardline position was blatantly rejected, and Sun was powerless to do anything to prevent his *hufa* ideals from being compromised.⁶⁴⁹

The Shanghai Peace Conference in Retrospect

The Shanghai Peace Conference, I believe, could be viewed from two angles which are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, we may see it as the product of the power politics within Beijing. The Conference, as Cao Rulin pointedly remarked, was Xu's weapon in his effort to strengthen his position *vis-a-vis* Duan and the military.⁶⁵⁰ In this respect, the Conference was remarkably successful before its break-up in May 1919. By this time, Xu had clearly seized the initiative from Duan in the decision-making process within the government. Duan, to be sure, did try to contain Xu's peace effort, but he failed to do anything. Indeed, even though members of the Anfu parliament did try to flex their muscles in April in an attempt to derail any settlement on the constitutional question, they were not able to do so.

On the other hand, the Conference may also be seen as an attempt by politicians across the political spectrum to resolve problems which had plagued the Republic since its inception, constitutional and otherwise. The delegates tried to rectify the problem of excessive military expenditure by devising a large-scale program to reduce the number of armies. They tried to contain the power of the

⁶⁴⁹See Sun's letter to members of the Canton parliament in Shanghai on 27 April 1919 in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 5:48-49.

⁶⁵⁰See Cao, *Yisheng*, p.184. See also Cen, *Liang* 2:43.

military generals by reasserting the power of civilian officials and abolishing the WPA. They tried to bring back the cooperation between the center and the provinces which had been non-existent since July 1917. Above all, they tried to resolve the constitutional quagmire by various schemes through which a permanent constitution would be quickly drafted, and through which the inadequacies of the Provisional Constitution would be remedied.

To be sure, the solutions they proposed were modest in scale. Zhu, for instance, was surprised that Tang was not interested in devising any scheme which would define and reform the workings of local government.⁶⁵¹ It is true that granted there were elaborate plans to cut armies, but all of the delegates recognized that Duan would still remain powerful after the reforms, and that the proper role of the military in politics would still remain poorly defined. Neither did the two sides discuss extensively what kind of permanent constitution China should adopt to improve on the 1912 Provisional Constitution, even though they agreed that the Provisional Constitution as it stood did not work. What should the proper balance of power between the executive and the legislative be, for instance? How much power should the parliament assume? Both sides recognized such problems, but their proposals merely left these questions to the discretion of the future parliament.

Yet before we criticize Xu and the delegations any further, it is important to bear the context of the Conference in mind, and be reminded of how volatile the situation actually was in early 1919. Xu must have been well aware of the fact that if he was to be more ambitious in his goals, he would run the risk of generating more

⁶⁵¹Zhu Qiqian to Qian Nengxun, 13 April 1919, Danganguan, "Nanbei yihe fuhuihou", pp.4-5.

controversies and giving his enemies more opportunities to discredit his regime. After all, he was dealing with a China which had been divided for nearly two years, and in which two rival governments still existed. His urgent task was, therefore, and quite rightly, to find a quick settlement before proceeding to formulate more grandiose plans. In addition, Xu must also have known that time was on his side. If he could successfully restore peace and unity to the country and resolve the many problems I raised above, would he not become a national hero? Would he not then have the authority to further limit the power of the military, and assume a free hand in carrying out whatever reforms he might wish to pursue?

Furthermore, in retrospect, the Conference was actually very successful in achieving the modest goals it set itself. The two sides came to an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, a reduction of armies, a restoration of cooperation between Beijing and the provinces, and were about to agree on a settlement on the constitutional question which would bring about a restoration of unity to the country. Despite all the turmoil the Republic experienced in its first eight years, the North and the South were, by late April 1919, about to come to a settlement which probably would give the Republic a new lease of life. How often does one see a country in the midst of a bloody civil war being able to accomplish that?

But why was this possible? Part of the reason, I believe, lies in the fact that Xu Shichang, for his own political reasons, was ready to grant substantial concessions to the South, despite Beijing's military superiority. What is equally important, however, was the fact that there were sufficient common interests between the North and the South which pulled the two sides back together. If Xu had a great deal to gain from a success of the negotiations, so did most of the political factions in the South, for

reasons already explained above. This was why despite the heavy pressure Sun exerted on Tang throughout the Conference, the negotiations had in fact not gone the way of the radicals at all. What Sun needed was a more powerful rallying force which would discredit the Conference and relegitimize his *hufa* effort. He was going to find that force in the May Fourth events, which will be the topic of my next chapter.

Chapter Seven:

Rewriting May Fourth History: Power and Politics in mid-1919

On May 4, 1919, several thousand students took to the streets of Beijing and held a mass demonstration. They were protesting against the Versailles Conference, which decided to transfer former German concessions in Shandong to Japan instead of returning them to China. What they did not know was that their activities were to culminate into a nation-wide mass movement, resulting in the resignation of key government officials and China's rejection of the Versailles Treaty. Even less could they have imagined that their actions were to serve as a model for generations to come, and were to inspire similar popular mass-movements, the most notable being the pro-democracy movement in the summer of 1989.

Indeed, the May Fourth events⁶⁵² have come to assume a mythical status in Chinese popular consciousness. And historians nowadays have likewise come to treat the May Fourth incidents as of equal, if not more, importance as events such as the 1911 Revolution or the Communist victory in 1949. The May Fourth events have come not only to represent the crystallization of new currents of thought in society since late Qing, but are seen as catalysts for further change and modernization.⁶⁵³ Furthermore, what happened in the summer months of 1919 are seen as a turning point in the history of Chinese nationalism. For the first time, it is said, the Chinese

⁶⁵²Throughout this essay, this term is used to refer specifically to what happened in May and June of 1919, not the whole cultural movement which followed.

⁶⁵³Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*; V. Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*; J. Chen, *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai*.

populace have stood up to a corrupt government and foreign domination, and in the end fought successfully for what they demanded.⁶⁵⁴

What is curious is that however important the May Fourth events are seen to be, they have up-to-now actually received only limited scrutiny as to what really happened at that time. This is not to say that there have not been full-scale studies of the events. But so far the story as told by historians has been at best an one-sided one. It is a story as perceived by the participants: how they felt betrayed by a corrupt government; how they lamented over the torturous path of China's modernization process; and how proud they were to lead the masses in response to the national crisis in the summer of 1919.⁶⁵⁵ But the problem of this narrative is that it not only ignores the political context in which the May Fourth took place, but more importantly, it reduces the Beijing government to a body aimed only to suppress student activities and strike deals with the foreign powers.⁶⁵⁶ But was this really the case? Ironically, at a time when many historians lament on the lack of histories written from the "bottom up", the history of the May Fourth presents us with quite the opposite problem. There

⁶⁵⁴This is apparent in Chow, *May Fourth*, esp. chps 5-6. This is also a point emphasized by Marxist scholars: Peng Ming, *Wusi Yundongshi*, chp.12. Jefferey Wasserstrom's book also implicitly conveys this view: Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai*, chps. 2-3.

⁶⁵⁵This is especially true in Wasserstrom's book, which conveys an image of the student activists being victims under the oppression of the government.

⁶⁵⁶This is perhaps not surprising. Both Nationalist and Communist writers have a vested interest in discrediting the Beijing government to reaffirm the legitimacy of their subsequent revolutions, and Communist writers in particular want to show the potency of Chinese mass movements against imperialism. This interpretation is also what most of our sources lead us to subscribe to. By relying primarily on the memoirs of the student participants of the events, newspapers which were predominantly sympathetic to the students, and writings and publications which were by and large anti-government, it is not surprising that scholars will have up to now narrated the story from the viewpoint of the students.

are many, if not too many, narratives, from the bottom up, but basically none from "top-down", and none about the government during the May Fourth.⁶⁵⁷

But unless we understand the political background of the May Fourth events, we will not be able to acquire a full appreciation of what really happened in the summer months of 1919. The May Fourth events, indeed, occurred when heated debates on the constitutional future were taking place in the country, and the events would have a decisive impact on the outcome of those debates. This chapter will examine closely the impact the May Fourth incidents had on the Shanghai Peace Conference and the Beijing government, the latter being the target of the students' attack. I will analyze how Xu's government tried to diffuse the crisis and steer the country back to the constitutional discussions between the North and the South, and explain why in the end his effort would come to nought. Through this I hope to cast the May Fourth in a new light, and emphasize its importance in deciding the constitutional future of the early Chinese Republic.

The May Fourth Events

Just when there was every indication that Xu Shichang's "great enterprise" was about to succeed in late April as I have described in chapter six, disturbing news from abroad regarding the Versailles Conference was starting to come in. A rumor began to surface that the Versailles Conference would not transfer the concessions of Shandong

⁶⁵⁷There are analyses of what the response of the government was, but the treatment is usually unsympathetic and superficial. For instance, Chow, *May Fourth*, pp.118-120. Wasserstrom also says that politics was not important in the May Fourth: see Wasserstrom, *Student Protests*, pp.117-118.

back to China, but would instead transfer them to Japan. When this rumor was confirmed in early May, students from several colleges in Beijing decided to hold a demonstration. Their intention was to first to hold a rally in Tiananmen Square, and then proceed to the legation quarters to present their petitions. But when they discovered that there was no one to accept their petitions in the foreign quarters, they decided to go to the house of Minister Cao Rulin to protest instead.⁶⁵⁸ The situation soon got out of hand there, with some students breaking into Cao's house and setting fire to it. Cao Rulin managed to escape from the harassment of the students, but another minister who happened to be with Cao, Zhang Zhongxiang, was beaten up. As a result of all this, about 30 students were arrested.⁶⁵⁹

What happened on May 4 immediately put the Shandong question in the sharp focus of the media, and other matters which were arguably as important, such as the Shanghai Peace Conference, were eclipsed. Xu's government was at a loss as to what should be done. Firstly there was the question of how to handle the students in custody. On the one hand, Xu knew very well that the students' actions, improper they might be, actually enjoyed widespread popular sympathy, because it was thought that the students did what they did only because of their love for the country. To levy any punishment on the students would be to alienate the popular support he had worked so hard for in the past few months.⁶⁶⁰ On the other hand, if he were to be lenient to

⁶⁵⁸Some of the students did not realize that they were going to Cao's house until very late: see Wang Tongzhao, "Huiyi Beijing xuesheng wusi aiguo yundong", *Wusi yundong huiyilu* ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1:248.

⁶⁵⁹Chow, *May Fourth*, 99-116. Saito Michihiko, 5.4 *Undo no kyozo to jitsuzo: 1919-nen 5-gatsu 4-nichi*, Peking.

⁶⁶⁰Even people who disliked the students' violent behaviour, like Liang Shuming, showed sympathy to the students for their patriotism: Yang Lianggong et.al. eds., *Wusi*, pp.101-103.

them, he knew he could be accused of weak leadership and having no concern for law and order, especially by the militarists.

The problem became more complex because as we know, the May 4 incident spelt the beginning, not the end, of student activism. In the weeks after May 4, the students in Beijing were joined by those in other major cities in holding mass rallies, lecturing in the streets, distributing pamphlets, and so on.⁶⁶¹ And they promised not to abate their effort until the government satisfied their demands. But the trouble for Xu's government was that those demands were very difficult, if not impossible, to accept. Firstly, the students wanted the immediate release of their classmates, and I have already outlined Xu's dilemma on this. Furthermore, they wanted China to reject the Versailles Treaty, a move which could seriously damage China's relations with the powers. Most explosive of all, they wanted Xu to sack Cao Rulin and punish Duan Qirui, whom they saw as "traitors" who had sold China to Japan by their various secret agreements in the past. Cao had been a key official in Xu's cabinet because of his connections in the financial world, and his importance can be highlighted by the fact that Xu sought his support immediately after he became President.⁶⁶² To sack him could not but be a great blow to the government, and would send a chilling message to Xu's allies that Xu would not hesitate to sacrifice them in order to save himself. As for punishing Duan Qirui, it would essentially mean taking on the military establishment publicly, and even if Xu had the will, he probably did not have the way to do it.

⁶⁶¹ See Wasserstrom, *Student Protests*, chps 2-3.

⁶⁶² Xu offered Cao to be either Minister of Finance or Minister of Communications, arguably the two most important posts in the cabinet beside the Premier: see Cao, *Yisheng*, pp.180-181.

If the ends the students sought were difficult for the government to accept, the means they used to achieve their goals, such as rallies, street lecturing, and in particular, boycotts, were equally hard for the government to tolerate. Firstly, even though many of the student demonstrations started as protests directed only against Japan, Duan Qirui, or Cao Rulin, many eventually became simply anti-government exercises.⁶⁶³ Furthermore, because we have up-to-now paid little attention to the students' campaign to boycott Japanese goods in those months, we have overlooked how threatening this campaign actually was. The students went from store after store to check whether shopkeepers were selling Japanese goods. If they were, then the students would try to "persuade" them not to. But if the shopkeepers refused, the students did not hesitate to disrupt the business of the shop in question, threaten the shopkeepers with brute force, or confiscate their Japanese goods without compensation.⁶⁶⁴ This was why in the months of May and particularly June there was in fact considerable opposition against the activities of the students.⁶⁶⁵ It was even suggested, and with some evidence, that the students used the boycott to profit themselves.⁶⁶⁶ If this was not enough, in some places, like Leqing county in Henan, the students actually completely remapped the existing hierarchies of power within the local community. Under the leadership of their headmaster, high school students in Leqing became a terrorizing force on their own. They ransacked any store which still sold Japanese goods, ridiculed merchants who tried to argue with them, and effectively

⁶⁶³See the report of the Beijing Police to the Minister of Interior (May, 1919?), SHA 1001/1054(2).

⁶⁶⁴See Chen Qingchen, "Wusi shiqi Luoyang dizhi rihuo de huiyi", *Wusi yundong huiyilu: xu ed.* Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo. pp.418-419.

⁶⁶⁵The fact that most memoirs of the students concede that merchants were often unwilling to carry out a boycott is perhaps the best evidence for this.

⁶⁶⁶See the reports received by Wang Guangyu, head of the Defense Force of Beijing, in SHA 1023/101 no. 31 (June 24); 1023/232 vol.2 no.32 (June 24), no.38 (July 1).

took over the administration of the county. And in face of these student activists , the local elites were incapable of doing anything to stop them.⁶⁶⁷

What made this kind of student activism the more menacing was its anti-Japanese nature. There was above all the danger of anti-Japanese feelings running out of control. During some of the demonstrations, it was reported that some students made a effigy of a Japanese and publicly humiliated it all they could.⁶⁶⁸ There were cases in which Japanese civilians were beaten up and Japanese property destroyed.⁶⁶⁹ In some rallies there were even calls to form associations to kill all Japanese in China.⁶⁷⁰ It was therefore not surprising that Xu's government at this time was under severe pressure from the Japanese government to do something about the situation.⁶⁷¹ Could Xu afford to antagonize as powerful a neighbor as Japan and give her an excuse to meddle in Chinese affairs even further?

⁶⁶⁷See the complaints filed by the local elites to Beijing received in July, 1919. They said they supported patriotic students who protested against the decision of the Versailles, but not what the students did in their own county in the past weeks. SHA 1001/1068 (2). The subsequent investigation carried out by the county administration, not surprisingly, denied some of the allegations, but even the latter was not able to deny the fact that the students had become a very powerful force in the county because of their actions.

⁶⁶⁸See the draft instruction from the Ministry of the Interior to the Police Squad in Beijing, May 23, 1919 in *Wusi aiguo yundong dangan ziliao*. eds. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, pp.195-196.

⁶⁶⁹Most notably in Wuhu, but there were many other instances. See Li Yushu et.al. eds., *Zhongri guanxi shiliao: Pairi wenti*, pp. 1-71.

⁶⁷⁰See the report from Jinan, May 7, 1919 in Kexueyuan, *Dangan*, pp.205-206.

⁶⁷¹The Japanese government was very concerned about the activitiees, and this was why they made many protests in this period. See in particular the one enclosed in the letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, May 30, 1919, Kexueyuan, *Dangan*, pp.200-202. The Japanese public was even more concerned, because many believed that there was something conspiratorial behind the May Fourth events. See clippings of contemporary newspapers in Kyoto Daigaku, *Nihon shimbun 5-4 hodo shiryo shusei*, and Huang Tzu-chin, *Yoshino Sakuzo dui jindai zhongguo de renshi yu pingjia*, pp.161-170.

Everyone For Himself

What complicated the situation at that time was that the alliances Xu worked so hard to build up in the past half-year began to crumble in face of the crisis, and friends and foes alike wanted to take advantage of the situation to serve their own purposes. This was nowhere more apparent than in the case of Duan Qirui, who was supposedly one of the main targets of attack of the student demonstrators. As I have explained in earlier sections, even though Duan was the person who helped Xu to become President, Xu "betrayed" Duan by pursuing his own policy once he assumed the presidency. The May Fourth was, therefore, an opportunity for Duan to flex his muscles. First, Duan tried to discredit Xu in front of Xu's allies. For instance, immediately after the May 4 incident, Duan went to persuade Cao Rulin not to resign in order to embarrass Xu.⁶⁷² When rumors surfaced that Xu had already approved of Cao's resignation in mid-May, Duan again rushed to Cao's house and complained of Xu's inability to protect his colleagues. As Duan said, if Xu would not stand by his friends in times of crisis, "why would anyone want to work with him anymore"? Even Cao believed that Duan aimed to undermine his loyalty to Xu.⁶⁷³

What was more was that the May Fourth events served to strengthen Duan's resolve to take over the government. He began to put pressure on Xu to punish the students,⁶⁷⁴ and was apparently trying to have his protege Wang Yitang replace Qian

⁶⁷²Cao, *Yisheng*, p.199.

⁶⁷³Cao, *Yisheng*, p.201.

⁶⁷⁴Read the work by the journalist, Tao, *Beiyang*, 2:873-874.

Nengxun as the Premier.⁶⁷⁵ And the pressure Duan exerted was not merely verbal, but also military. Rumors were flying around from mid-May onwards that a coup might be forthcoming.⁶⁷⁶ Indeed, the May Fourth gave Duan a chance to reassert his dominance.

A similar pattern of behavior may be detected among the parliamentary members of the Northern Parliament in Beijing. Immediately after the May 4 incident, they began to publicly attack Xu's protege, Premier Qian, and accused him of incompetence in handling the Shandong question. In retrospect, it is strange that a parliament very much controlled by Duan Qirui could ever portray itself as the protector of Chinese sovereignty, but this was in fact what happened.⁶⁷⁷ On May 8, some members even initiated a motion to impeach Qian, and said that Qian should resign because he "humiliated the country by surrendering its sovereign rights".⁶⁷⁸

It is difficult to determine how much of this was prompted by Duan to further embarrass Xu's government. What is clear is that this position the members of parliament took served their political interests very well. First, they avoided any criticisms from the student activists by taking a patriotic stance and by putting all the blame on Xu's government. Indeed, the strategy of the Northern Parliament at this juncture was to support whatever policy which was popular, at least publicly. This

⁶⁷⁵*Minguo ribao*, May 12, 1919, p.6; *Tao, Beiyang*, 2:874.

⁶⁷⁶*North China Herald*, May 24, 1919. Duan's key supporter, Xu Shucheng, was rumored to be transferring troops to the capital. See *CCER*, May 14, 1919. This is an intelligence report from the Guangdong Customs.

⁶⁷⁷This was why *Minguo ribao* said that this was "opportunistic patriotism", May 11, 1919, p.7.

⁶⁷⁸Zhonghua minguo shishi jiyao weiyuanhui ed., *Zhonghua minguo shishi jiyao*, 1919 (1): 648-649. Qian eventually resigned on June 11, 1919.

was precisely why they shocked Xu by publicly attacking him and his policy, even though privately they had already agreed to support him on the issue of China signing the Versailles Treaty⁶⁷⁹

Furthermore, the May Fourth events gave the Northern parliamentary members a chance to take revenge against a president whom they thought had betrayed their interests. As I have said, it was this parliament which elected Xu as president in the first place. But instead of being grateful, Xu's subsequent actions often ran counter to the parliament's interests. After Xu assumed the presidency, he immediately began to engage in talks with the South and its rival government. The Shanghai Conference, while welcomed by most of the country, was greeted with horror by the Northern Parliament, because its members believed, and quite rightly, that the very act of negotiating with the South compromised their parliament's claim of legitimacy. And in April, as I have described, the parliament learned that it was about to be dissolved as part of a compromise with the South. The members were, however, powerless to do anything, and it was the May Fourth incidents which gave them a chance to discredit a government against which they harbored deep resentment.

Strangely enough, in this respect, the Northern Parliament found itself in the unlikely company of its bitter enemies, Sun Yatsen and his associates, who were similarly exploiting the May Fourth to serve their own political purposes. After Sun heard about what happened in Beijing on May 4, he immediately instructed Shao Zili, the chief editor of the *Minguo Ribao*, the newspaper of the Chinese Revolutionary

⁶⁷⁹*Minguo ribao*, June 14, 1919, p.6. Indeed, we know with some certainty that the members actually supported the signing of the Versailles: see SHA 05/33(3) Cabinet to Lu Zhengxiang, May 15, 1919.

Party, to publicize what happened.⁶⁸⁰ And publicize the events Shao did.⁶⁸¹ In the following weeks, *Minguo Ribao* devoted nearly all its pages to reporting the activities of the students, commanding them for their bravery and patriotism on the one hand, and chastising the Beijing government for its alleged tyranny on the other. Furthermore, the paper did not shy away from publishing unsubstantiated rumors which were deeply prejudicial against the government. For instance, on May 6, it reported that the government was about to sentence the arrested students to death, even though there was no proof at all.⁶⁸² There was, again, an unsubstantiated report that Beijing University was going to be dissolved.⁶⁸³ The purpose of all this was clearly to stir things up.

This was not all. Even though Sun claimed that his primary interest at this time was to "write books behind closed doors", this was not the case at all. Sun put pressure on the Southern government in Guangzhou to issue a statement in mid-May which virulently condemned the Beijing government and commended on the students' love for the country.⁶⁸⁴ Sun met with the student activists many times in Shanghai in May and June, encouraging them to continue their fight and praising them for their patriotism.⁶⁸⁵ According to the participants, Sun also gave them financial help as well. In fact, Sun even employed several English and French lawyers to help the Shanghai

⁶⁸⁰Chen, *Nianpu changpian*, 2:1108-1109.

⁶⁸¹Shao was personally involved in mobilizing the students. See Zhu Shunzuo, *Shao Zilizhuan*, pp.82ff.

⁶⁸²*Minguo ribao*, May 6, 1919, p.2.

⁶⁸³*Minguo ribao*, May 6, 1919, p.2.

⁶⁸⁴Lu Fang-shang, *Geming zhi zaiqi*, p.26.

⁶⁸⁵See Chen, *Nianpu changpian*, 2:1173-1174; Xu Deheng, "Sun Zhongshan xiānshèng duì wú sī xuēshèng yùndòng de tōngchéng hé zhǐchí", *Huiyilu*, ed. Kexueyuan, 2:637-638.

students when the latter were in trouble with the foreign authorities in the concessions.⁶⁸⁶ But Sun's most important role was perhaps to lend legitimacy to the students and their activities. It gave the students the more a sense of destiny, and the more a belief that what they were doing was right.

But why did Sun get himself so involved? Up-to-now historians have simply assumed that it was a matter of course that Sun would support the students, because the students were fighting against imperialism and a corrupt government. There is certainly some truth in this assumption, because as Sun professed in the Principle of Nationalism, it was important that China be sovereign and completely free from foreign control. But while Sun believed that China must eventually shake off its semi-colonial status, he did not always oppose concessions to the foreign powers. It is now well-known that in various stages of his political career, Sun offered concessions to imperialistic powers in return for their support.⁶⁸⁷ Furthermore, it was not at all a matter of course that Sun would join in any protest against foreign encroachment. During the nation-wide protests against the Twenty-One Demands in 1915, Sun was a mere bystander, because he believed that supporting the movement would only serve to increase the strength of his arch-rival, Yuan Shikai, who was backing the movement.⁶⁸⁸

Indeed, an equally important reason for Sun's heavy involvement was that he realized it was the only chance he had in ruining the Shanghai Peace Conference. The

⁶⁸⁶Chen, *Nianpu changpian*, 2:1174.

⁶⁸⁷Jansen, *Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*, pp.188-189; Ernest Young, "Chinese Leaders and Japanese Aid in the early Chinese Republic", in *Chinese and Japanese*, ed. Iriye, pp.129-140.

⁶⁸⁸Friedman, *Backward*, pp.94-97.

success of the Conference would not only mean that his own ideal about erecting a new constitutional system would be defeated, but also that his own political position would be severely undermined. So ironically, the actions of the patriotic students became Sun's weapon in his fight against a Conference which aimed at restoring peace and unity. In the aftermath of the May Fourth events, Sun and his associates began to attack Tang and exert great pressure on him to take a hard-line position, something which they eventually succeeded in doing.⁶⁸⁹ On May 10, Tang presented a set of demands to the Northern delegates, and informed them that unless these demands were met, the Southern delegation would have to immediately withdraw from the Conference. But those demands, which included punishing alleged "traitors" such as Duan Qirui and Cao Rulin,⁶⁹⁰ were not only extreme but simply out of line with previous discussions.⁶⁹¹ Tang probably did not expect the North to agree to those demands himself, but was probably hoping that a rejection from the North would at least give him the excuse to resign from what he must have come to consider as an impossible job.⁶⁹² On May 13, the Shanghai Peace Conference broke up. So a conference for which Xu worked hard came to a premature and tragic end.

⁶⁸⁹Zhu Qiqian certainly believed that Sun had a lot to do with the sudden presentation of the Eight Demands explained below. Zhu felt that Tang presented these demands to please Sun. SHA 3003/22 Zhu to Premier Qian, May 15, 1919 (no.3) There can be no doubt that Sun and his associates, Sun Bolan in particular, put great pressure on Tang. See Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, pp.269-270, Zhu to Premier Qian, May 13, 1919.

⁶⁹⁰On those demands, see Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, pp.260-261. Zhu Qiqian certainly thought that the demands were unfair. See Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.268 for Zhu's telegram to Premier Qian on May 13, 1919.

⁶⁹¹For instance, about the demand to punish Duan Qirui, the two sides basically came to an agreement that it would not be raised because the North objected to it vehemently: see SHA 1003/846 Zhu to Premier Qian, April 10, 1919. So the fact that Tang was raising it meant that he aimed to stir up trouble.

⁶⁹²Kexueyuan, *Yijiū yijiū*, p.270. Zhu to Premier Qian, May 15, 1919.

What must have in particular disappointed Xu was that even former allies began to take advantage of the situation for their own political purposes. This was nowhere more apparent than when his Research Clique allies began to desert him. When in late April, Liang Qichao, at that time an advisor to the Chinese delegation at Versailles, sent back the news concerning the Conference's decision on Shandong, some Research Clique members were obviously convinced that their golden opportunity had come. They realized that they could use this issue to revitalize their own political fortune, even though they must also have been aware of the fact that what they did would seriously hurt their ally, Xu Shichang. On May 2, one of its leaders, Lin Changmin, published a very provocative article on the Shandong question in the *Guomin Ribao*, the newspaper of the Research Clique. He started with

Jiaozhou is finished! Shandong is finished! The country is not like a country anymore! The country is going to be destroyed very soon! I hope our four million people will vow to fight the issue till death.⁶⁹³

Lin said that the primary blame for China's humiliation should be put on, not surprisingly, his political rivals Duan Qirui and Cao Rulin. The article was very influential, and by equating the loss of Shandong to the destruction of China, Lin greatly heated up the political atmosphere.⁶⁹⁴ Lin continued to be very active in mass rallies and in helping the student activists. He organized street lectures and distributed scathing pamphlets against Duan and Cao, and he was the main organizer behind the parade on May 7 in Beijing, which aimed to protest the Shandong decision as well as

⁶⁹³Text in Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, p.233.

⁶⁹⁴It is difficult to know the circulation of the newspaper, but according to participants of the May Fourth events, the article was highly influential: see Wang Fuzhou, "Wo suo jide de wusi yundong", *Zhuanji wenxue* 10.5 (May, 1967), p.28. The Research Clique continued to publicize their cause in their newspaper, *Chen bao*.

to commemorate the Twenty-One Demands four years ago. It was reported that Lin went so far as to bring a coffin to his rallies, apparently showing his willingness to die for his cause.⁶⁹⁵ This kind of theatrical performance greatly inspired the student activists. To Cao Rulin, and probably with some truth, it was Lin who was responsible for sustaining the student movement when it might be running out of steam in mid-May.⁶⁹⁶

Taking the Middle-Ground

So the task before Xu was a very difficult one. How should he deal with the students who burnt Cao's house? How should he deal with the students' demand to sack Cao, his close ally? How should he deal with China's humiliation at Versailles? One option was of course to side with the students and tap into their nationalistic enthusiasm, but this meant alienating some of his friends, like Cao, and publicly confronting the military led by Duan Qirui. Xu could, on the other hand, take the conservative course and support the militarists, but he would risk losing popular support and more importantly, the control of his government to the military.

In the end, Xu took the moderate course, and played what I would call "middle-ground politics". A case in point was how he dealt with what the students did in Cao's

⁶⁹⁵Cao mentioned this incident, although he did not name names. Cao, *Yisheng*, pp.200-201. We know now that he was referring to Lin: Zhang, *Liang Qichao*, p.233.

⁶⁹⁶Cao, *Yisheng*, p.201. Intelligence reports emphasized Lin's role as well. See 1023/101, Report to the head of the Defense Force in Beijing, Wang Guangyu, No.30, June 23, 1919. Japanese newspapers were especially convinced of Lin's conspiratorial intentions. See Kyoto Daigaku, *Nihon shimbun*, p.235, p.248, p.395 for various reports from different newspapers.

house. On May 6 and again May 8, Xu issued two statements about what happened on May 4.⁶⁹⁷ While conventionally these statements have been treated as proof for the government's brutality, a close reading of them will yield a rather different interpretation. For instance, the May 6 statement placed its emphasis, strangely enough, not on the students' behavior, but on the alleged incompetence of the Beijing Police in stopping the violence. The May 8 statement was more explicit in its criticism against the students, but even then there seemed to be sympathy toward their behavior, as they were portrayed essentially as young people led astray. Xu's attitude toward the arrested students was similarly ambiguous. While the government decided that it would prosecute these students, there was little effort to make the charges stick. If anything, Xu seemed to be all too keen to placate the students by trying to get Cai Yuanpei, the President of Beijing University who resigned after the May 4 incident, to return to his post.⁶⁹⁸

This ambivalence in policy was again evident in Xu's handling of the problem of Cao Rulin. When Cao submitted his resignation to Xu in disgust in the aftermath of what had happened in his house, Xu issued a public statement urging Cao to stay in office and disregard unsubstantiated rumors.⁶⁹⁹ Yet Xu never publicly defended Cao's reputation, and it was probably because of this that there were persistent rumors from mid-May onwards that Cao had already tendered his resignation. Xu himself knew

⁶⁹⁷For the documents, see Kexueyuan, *Dangan*, pp.184-85; 187-188.

⁶⁹⁸SHA 1057/42(2) Ministry of Education to the Nanjing Office of Education, May 13, 1919.

⁶⁹⁹Kexueyuan, *Dangan*, 301.

that he had not supported his ally as much as he should. He offered to buy Cao a new house to compensate for what Cao went through, but Cao declined his goodwill.⁷⁰⁰

In retrospect, Xu's strategy was at heart aimed at avoiding controversies and appeasing all the parties involved. This explained why Xu suddenly sought frequent consultation with the military, members of the Northern Parliament, and provincial leaders in the aftermath of the May 4 incident, something which he had not done before.⁷⁰¹ The aim was probably to minimize his own responsibility in making those difficult decisions over issues such as whether to sign the Versailles Treaty. An extreme example of this strategy of evasion can be seen when Xu's government decided in late May that China should sign the Treaty, Premier Qian went to Duan Qirui and asked him to endorse the decision and issue it in *his name*. But when Qian saw that the statement drew very negative response from the public, he then refused to endorse it himself, and put all the responsibility on Duan's shoulders.⁷⁰²

Whether such tactics would work depended heavily on whether the public would soon lose interest in the issues at hand: the arrested students, Cao's resignation, and the Versailles. As it turned out, however, this did not happen, and Xu soon found that his politics of "middle-ground" pleased no one. The student activists, not surprisingly, were not grateful to Xu for his relatively lenient policy toward the arrested students, yet his allies were deeply angered by his apparent lack of support for

⁷⁰⁰Cao, *Yisheng*, p.200.

⁷⁰¹See Xu Shichang's May, 1919 entries in his diaries, *Taoyang*, vol.45.

⁷⁰²We are told of this incident by the writer Nanhai Renzi. Nanhai, "Anfu", 4:398-399. There is no way to know whether this was indeed true, but circumstantial evidence, I think, shows that this is a truthful account. Throughout the book the author tries to discredit Duan, so if the story were not true, why would the author include something which actually portrays Duan in a good light?

them in times of crisis. For instance, Cao was very angry with Xu because even though he had helped Xu on many occasions, Xu did nothing concrete and nothing in public to defend his reputation. Meanwhile, Xu's moderation only gave increased ammunition to militarists like Duan to attack Xu as a weak leader. By late May, 1919, Xu was beginning to lose control of the government to hard-line militarists like Duan.⁷⁰³ The consequence of this was the proclamation of martial law on May 25, leading to the massive arrests in early June, which in return resulted in nation-wide strikes against the government in the following weeks.⁷⁰⁴ Unfortunately for Xu, these events took the situation completely out of his grasp. In mid-June, Xu offered to resign. Even though eventually he was to stay in office, he could no longer command nearly the same degree of control over the government as he did before.

Us and Them

In many ways, the problems Xu faced during the May Fourth crisis demonstrates how difficult it was for governments in the late Qing and the early Republic to deal with issues concerning imperialism and foreign domination. During the May Fourth, the question was, how should China respond to the ambitions of Japan and the humiliation at Versailles? To the student activists, the answer was pure and simple: China should fight to the very end. First and foremost, China should reject the Versailles Treaty, because China should never sign away any of its rights.

⁷⁰³Indeed, according to the the British ambassador, the May Fourth events served to strengthen the military. British Foreign Office 405/226, p.112.

⁷⁰⁴See Chow, *May Fourth*, chp.6.

Furthermore, the government should punish all those who were supposedly responsible for China's plight, such as Cao Rulin and Duan Qirui.

But while the students believed that it was wrong to sign the Treaty, they did not seem to have given any thought as to whether the refusal to sign the Treaty would in reality serve or hurt China's interests. It was the government which took the time to determine which policy options best served China's interests. In the wake of the decision of Versailles, the Cabinet and the Foreign Office immediately sought to examine the options available to China, and weigh the pros and cons of each. Throughout this period, the government's hope was to sign the Treaty with reservations. This was yet another example of Xu's "middle-ground" politics. China would sign the Treaty, but at the same time stating that it would not accept the Treaty's provisions concerning Shandong. Therefore, the government hoped that it would be able to appease the public and at the same time serve China's diplomatic interests.⁷⁰⁵ But it was soon apparent that the Powers would not agree to it. Furthermore, there was the worry that even if this was possible, it would still neither calm down the agitation, nor do any good to China's position in Shandong practice.⁷⁰⁶ So the basic question which remained was: to sign or not to sign.⁷⁰⁷

Of course, signing the Treaty would be damaging to China because it meant that Japan could now legitimately expand its influence in Shandong. But the

⁷⁰⁵Zhang Yongjin, *China in the International System, 1918-1920*, pp.78-88. For the materials on the negotiations for signing with reservations, see SHA 1003/822-825.

⁷⁰⁶SHA 1003/824 Lu Zhengxiang to the Cabinet, May 22, 1919.

⁷⁰⁷It is perhaps not surprising that in the end the Beijing government evaded responsibility and let the Chinese delegates decided whether to sign or not. The result, as is well-known, was that China did not sign. See Zhang, *International System*, pp.88-95.

government was, and quite rightly, even more worried about the possible consequences of a rejection of the Treaty. It would mean rebuffing the Western powers, and would rule out the possibility of China joining the forthcoming League of Nations as a founding member. It also meant that China would not be able to sign the peace treaties with the Austrians, and claim back the rights it lost to the latter. Most importantly of all, while a refusal would do little to change Japan's dominance in Shandong, it nevertheless would guarantee that the Powers would not mediate on behalf of China in the future, and that China would have to directly negotiate with Japan if it wanted to reclaim its rights.⁷⁰⁸

This was precisely why many Chinese diplomats were in favor of signing the Treaty.⁷⁰⁹ But could the government realistically afford to sign the Treaty, in view of the vociferous, and in fact outright violent, opposition of the student activists? The Beijing government and the Chinese delegation were fully aware of the fact that they would be forever stigmatized if they signed the Treaty,⁷¹⁰ but they also knew the dangers of not signing, as outlined above, very well. Even Wellington Koo, who supported the rejection of the Treaty, explained that the reason why he supported the policy to reject the Treaty was that he believed this was what the public wanted, and

⁷⁰⁸See SHA 05/33(3), Hu Weide, China's Minister to France, to the President, May 16, 1919; Dai Chenlin to the President SHA 1003/823 May 20, 1919.

⁷⁰⁹Chen Sanjing, "Lu Zhengxiang yu bali hehui", *Zhongguo jindaixiandaishi lunji, no.25 Minchu waijiao*, ed. Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong tuixing weiyuanhui, pp.511-515. Wellington Koo is misleading when he says that the members of the Chinese delegation were agreed that China should sign, because there were in fact heated debates on this issue; Gu Weijun (Wellington Koo), *Gu Weijun huiyilu* ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1:202, 211. See the secret meeting of the Chinese delegation on May 28, 1919, in Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 03-37-23(1). See also SHA 1003/821 Shi Zhaoji to the President, May 28, 1919, which talked about the different views members of the delegation held.

⁷¹⁰For instance, Lu Zhengxiang, the head of the Chinese delegation, was fully aware of the possible consequences: SHA 1003/823 Lu Zhengxiang to the President, May 8, 1919.

therefore this was what the government should do. Even he himself did not claim a rejection of the Treaty would serve China's interests better, in the short run or in the long.⁷¹¹ And it was perhaps no surprise that Koo would oppose signing as strongly as he did after all. Since Lu Zhengxiang, the head Chinese delegate at Versailles, was ill and had already indicated he would not sign the Treaty himself under any circumstances, Koo would have been the person responsible for the signing if there was to be one.⁷¹² Koo could not have been unaware of the possible consequences this could have on this career.

But such complex debates on the signature question never interested the students. To the students, the issue was simply that China should not sign because it was morally wrong to sign away any Chinese rights. What they were interested in, however, were finding the culprits for China's plight, "traitors" such as Duan Qirui, who they saw as *the primary source* of China's problems. And this view has some truth in it. The concessions approved by the Beijing government, in exchange for the Nishihara loans in 1917-1918, certainly gave Japan a much stronger argument at Versailles regarding the Shandong question. But in attributing China's problems completely to "evil ministers" in the government was to ignore the intractable problems China faced in dealing with foreign penetration. For instance, it is clear that even if China had not approved of the concessions to Japan which it did in 1917-1918, the outcome at Versailles was hardly likely to be different. As early as February, 1917,

⁷¹¹In his memoirs, Koo claims that he believed that the rejection of the Treaty would win China popular support both domestically and internationally. But he is rather cryptic as to whether (or how) this would outweigh the potential dangers of the rejection. Gu, *Huiyilu*, 1:208.

⁷¹²Lu was very categorical that he would not sign, because his involvement in the Twenty-One demands in 1915 already did him great harm. SHA 1003/823 Lu Zhengxiang to the President, May 14, 1919. It was clear that it would be Koo who would be sent to sign. SHA 1003/824 Lu Zhengxiang to the President, June 17, 1919.

Britain and France had already promised Japan their support over the Shandong question in exchange for Japanese help in the Far East.⁷¹³ Thus in any case, China could not have expected much help at the conference table, even if President Wilson was sympathetic to China's cause. The problem for China was that it was facing a Japan which was determined to extend its influence in China, and the Western powers were too preoccupied in Europe to help China and check Japan's ambitions. What could China do in face of a Japan which was both economically and militarily much more powerful than it was?

In many ways, the nature of student activism during the May Fourth events was strikingly similar to what might be called *qingyi* political criticism of imperial times. *Qingyi* politics had a history stretching back at least to the Ming dynasty. By *qingyi* politics, I refer to the ways in which literati-officials outside the locus of power grouped together to oppose the government on issues such as political participation, and particularly relevant to us here, foreign policy. Recent works on policy debates within the imperial government since the fifteenth century are illuminating in this area. One key characteristic of *qingyi* officials was that they were warlike and nationalistic, if not outright xenophobic. For instance, Samuel Chu and Bonnie Oh have shown how *qingyi* factions sought to undermine Li Hongzhang's peace policy before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and eventually succeeded in pushing Li to war.⁷¹⁴ James Polachek, in his study on the Opium War, has argued how the Spring Purification Faction in the Daoguang era similarly pressed the Beijing government for

⁷¹³M. Chi, *China Diplomacy 1914-1918*, pp.94-101.

⁷¹⁴S. Chu, "Chinese Attitudes Toward Japan at the Time of the Sino-Japanese War, in *Chinese and Japanese* ed. Iriye, pp.74-95; B. Oh, "The Leadership Crisis in China on the Eve of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895-1895", *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 29 (March, 1984), esp. pp.84-85.

war against England, even though they had little knowledge of the military strength of the latter.⁷¹⁵ For a more distant example, Arthur Waldron's study on the Great Wall analyzes how literati-officials in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries rejected the government's peaceful policy toward the Mongols. Instead, they urged that strong military actions against the "barbaric" steppe nomads be taken.⁷¹⁶

Particularly interesting are the arguments used by the *qingyi* officials to support their warlike posture. One cannot but be struck by how moralistic their arguments were. For instance, in the case of the Sino-Japanese War, they argued that China had to fight because Japan was a barbaric country which had defiled the Confucian culture. Therefore China had a moral obligation to fight, no matter what its consequences were. There was hardly any realistic appraisal of whether a war would serve China's interests, and whether China had the resources to conduct such a war.⁷¹⁷ In the same way, the officials who pressed for war against the Mongols in the Ming constantly injected moral arguments into their case, and completely disregarded how expensive and impractical their policy actually was.⁷¹⁸

Of course, the student activists of 1919 were not the literati-officials of imperial times. They were much younger, numerically much larger, and perhaps even further away from the decision-making process. The techniques the students used were also very different, as they were now able to drum up support by mass rallies and

⁷¹⁵J. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War*, chp 3.

⁷¹⁶A. Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, esp. chp 7. Waldron does not actually use the term *qingyi*, but his description of the situation fits my definition.

⁷¹⁷Chu, "Chinese Attitudes", pp.79-81.

⁷¹⁸Waldron, *Great Wall*, pp.108-111.

demonstrations. What is interesting, though, is the similarity between the student activists and the *qingyi* officials in their arguments. Like the *qingyi* officials, the students claimed the right to participate in the country's decision-making process in foreign policy, even though they might not have all the facts. Again, like the *qingyi* officials, they believed China's problems were caused solely by *human failure*, and more specifically, evil ministers in the government, and once they were removed, China would return to the right track. The only way to deal with foreign intrusion, was again, deceptively simple: China should fight till the very bitter end.

One may say that this mode of opposition was in fact a major factor for the strength of the student activists. By conceptualizing the complex political problems China faced at that time as being merely a battle between the "good" and the "evil", they avoided controversies over what China should do among themselves. Ironically, it was the Beijing government which was keen to discuss the issues in detail, especially concerning whether China should sign the Versailles Treaty or not. But unfortunately for Xu's government, it simply did not have the moral authority to combat the "idealistic" and "moralistic" accusations of the students. The legacy of problems left by Republican governments since 1912 had served to seriously undermine the legitimacy of the Beijing government. In any case, as I have shown in earlier sections, the government was all too divided to handle an onslaught of such magnitude.

Conclusions

In light of the above, we must reconceptualize what the May Fourth events really were, and disentangle the myth from the reality. There can be no doubt about the patriotism of the students. At the same time there is also no doubt that the students were often unrealistically idealistic, and that their cause was exploited by politicians for purposes they did not know and could not have dreamed of. The students were on the surface ultimately victorious in this episode, because Cao Rulin was forced to resign, and China eventually rejected the Versailles Treaty in late June. But were they? They attacked the militarists, but Duan Qirui in fact strengthened his grip over the government after the affair. They wanted the restoration of unity to the country, but they had unwittingly destroyed the Shanghai Conference by undermining Xu's government, the major sponsor of the Conference, and they ruined any chances of settling the constitutional problems the Republic was facing⁷¹⁹ They demanded good government, but they damaged a purposeful civilian president in Xu Shichang who intended not only to put the country back together, but also to introduce wide-ranging reforms after that.⁷²⁰

What is even more ironic is that while historians have conventionally seen the May Fourth as the glorious chapter of early Republican history,⁷²¹ and the endless

⁷¹⁹There were efforts at peace after this, but they were rather half-hearted attempts: see Li, *Political History*, pp.393-394.

⁷²⁰Xu had plans to improve the economy. See the proposals under consideration: SHA 1003/796. He was also thinking about reforming government finances: see 1027/14(2) Gong Xinzhan's report (February 21, 1919); 1027/15(2) for various proposals.

⁷²¹The romantic admiration for the May Fourth by modern-day historians is readily apparent in Schwarcz, *Chinese Enlightenment*.

factional rivalries in the political arena as the disgraceful one,⁷²² the two are in fact inseparably intertwined. Political factions, whose existence have often been seen as the reason for China's problems with republicanism, were strangely enough, an important supporting cast in the success story of the student activists. Indeed, the student activists found some unlikely company in their attacks against the government, such as the Research Clique and members of the Northern Parliament. In the end, it was precisely the factional nature of the Republican political arena which undermined Xu's capability to handle the situation, added allies to the students, and enabled the students to become as powerful as they did.

⁷²²Nathan. *Peking Politics*, esp. chp 8.

Last Words: 1919 as a Constitutional Turning Point

Conventionally, scholars have argued that the "failure" of the Chinese Republic was due to either the fact that Chinese politicians were too self-interested and factious for constitutional rule to work, or the fact that the military generals were too power-hungry to allow true republicanism to take root.⁷²³ But as I have shown in previous chapters, this view ignores the fact that a major reason why the Republic was in trouble in the 1910s was that there were genuine problems in the constitutional system at it stood at that time. The ambiguities of the 1912 Provisional Constitution, for instance, made it the more easy for rival factions to disagree. This was perhaps why despite the best of intentions in 1916 things would go so awfully wrong so soon.

But despite all these problems, Chinese politicians such as Xu Shichang were in the end able to come close in bringing about compromise. The fact that Xu Shichang was able to restore peace, albeit temporarily, and bring all sides back to the negotiating table in early 1919, was remarkable, because he was able to accomplish this despite the highly factionalized political arena, the thorny disagreements over the constitution, and the sabotage from political factions such as the Sun Yatsen and his associates. Perhaps this conclusively refutes the claim that Chinese politicians were too factious to reach political compromises. In April 1919, indeed, Xu's grand enterprise looked poised for success.

⁷²³Typical of these approaches are Nathan, *Peking Politics*; Li, *Political History*.

In many respects, one may say, the experience of China in parliamentarianism was not at great variance with that of Meiji and Taisho Japan, or that of the Weimar Republic in interwar Germany. Both of these countries had established a representative system of government which had yet to command unquestioned respect, and both of them faced problems concerning how the constitution should work. The analogy could go further. If Hara Kei in Japan tried to push the political system to a more democratic mode by promoting party cabinets, and Stresemann tried to ease the acceptance of the Weimar Constitution by the German populace through his various reforms, Xu Shichang likewise tried to strike a great compromise among all parties so that the constitutional system would work.⁷²⁴ In many ways, Xu faced even more formidable obstacles than his Japanese and German counterparts in late 1918: a rival government, a rival parliament, and hardline groups from both the left (Sun Yatsen) and the right (Duan Qirui). But despite all this, Xu did very well. But then, "unfortunately", there was the May Fourth.

The May Fourth events demonstrate once again how vulnerable early Republican governments were when it came to questions regarding imperialism and foreign domination. The fact that China was weak and often unable to resist foreign encroachment, and the fact that China was heavily dependent on loans from the same imperialist powers, severely undermined the legitimacy not only of the Republican governments, but also of the Republic and the constitutional system itself. Xu initially successfully rallied the public behind him with the promise of restoring peace and unity as well as genuine constitutional rule. But the fact that even Xu could not save

⁷²⁴For Hara Kei, see T. Najita, *Hara Kei and the Politics of Compromise 1905-1915*. For Stresemann, see C. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*.

himself when the Versailles decision went against him shows that despite his past credentials, even Xu was vulnerable to the forces of nationalism.

The year 1919 was, in many ways, a turning point in Chinese constitutional history. If Xu's "great enterprise" had succeeded, then the republican system as it was established by the revolutionaries of 1911 would have had a new lease of life, and would have had the chance to prove whether it was workable. Then all the civil wars and internal strife in the early 1920s might have been avoided. But events in the months of May and June changed the whole picture. They polarized the country, making any compromise very difficult, if not impossible. Because of China's failure in the Versailles Conference, the Beijing government was badly discredited, and it opened the doors for hard-line anti-government politicians like Sun Yatsen to flex their muscles. It was certainly no coincidence that Sun Yatsen began to denounce his enemies in the Southern government and reorganize the Guomindang shortly after the May Fourth events. On top of this, the May Fourth events convinced the military the need to adopt a hardline position against the South, which was precisely what it did after the events.

What was more was that the May Fourth events completely redefined the boundaries of political participation, further ensuring that the kind of constitutional rule as stipulated by the Provisional Constitution would be feasible no more. The May Fourth and its success unleashed an era of mass participation which the old constitutional system could not easily accommodate. As we shall see, once politicians such as Sun Yatsen saw the power of popular movement, they would jump to the opportunity of tapping into its forces, even though they knew very well that once the masses were mobilized., it was nearly impossible to control them.

The consequence of this was that the contemporary debate about the future of constitutionalism in China became all the more polarized. On the one side, there were those who favored a drastic increase in the extent of popular participation, and who considered the constitutional system of the 1910s inadequate to cope with the rising political activism among the public. On the other side, there were those who were alarmed by the advent of mass politics and sought to actually reduce political participation, a policy which Jiang Jieshi and the Guomindang would implement in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The middleground, as represented by the kind of limited participation offered by the constitutional system of the 1910s, found itself increasingly squeezed out.. Therefore, if 1919 was a watershed for Chinese intellectual history, it was likewise a landmark in Chinese constitutional history as well. It spelt the end of all hopes for the continuation of the constitutional system as it stood in the early 1910s, and opened the door for radical revisions in the 1920s and 1930s.

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