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# The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism

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ARTHUR WALDRON

IN THE CHINESE VOCABULARY, “warlord” (*junfa*) is what Raymond Williams calls a “keyword”: a term whose history and usage reveal how certain fundamental issues are understood.<sup>1</sup> This essay will examine the word and the idea of the “warlord” in China from the late 1910s, when it appears for the first time, to the present and will pay particular attention to what the use of the concept reveals about changing Chinese understandings of larger social and economic questions, specifically those of “militarism” and “imperialism.”

The term *junfa* is a relatively new one in Chinese. Apparently never used in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, it gained currency in the early 1920s and had come to dominate political discussion by the end of the decade. Many people believe that it is a native Chinese term for a characteristically Chinese pattern of politics. Indeed, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one sense of the English word “warlord” derives from the Chinese *junfa*.<sup>2</sup>

Plausible as such a derivation may be, I will argue that it is incorrect and that, far from being an indigenous Chinese category, the idea of the “Chinese warlord” or *junfa* is borrowed, ultimately, from Europe. But more important than this will be the argument that the adoption of the concept in Chinese marks a fundamental transition in the Chinese understanding of violence. Talk about “warlords” usually turns fairly quickly away from the individuals themselves to broader questions about their social and economic bases, both domestic and foreign. And these, whether we are aware of it or not, bring us to the issues that in the West have been debated under the broad heading of “militarism.” Thus the major purpose of this essay is to show how the turn-of-the-century Western debate about violence, militarism, and imperialism entered China, how it was assimilated, and not least, how it was modified to suit Chinese conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. and expanded edn. (London, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> “[A] military commander who has a regional power base and rules independently of the central government, esp. in the period 1916–28”; R. W. Burchfield, ed., *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1986), 4: 1217–18.

Since the “warlord” is so often thought of as a Chinese “ideal type,” perhaps I should begin with Max Weber’s observation in *The Religion of China* that China lacked “the military charisma of the warlord.”<sup>3</sup> Weber did not mean, of course, that Chinese history lacked either wars or warriors; rather, he was pointing out a difference between China and the West in the way violence has fit into the larger structures of society and culture. Subsequent work confirms his insight. The origin of the state in the West is generally thought to have involved violence; in China, by contrast, recent interpretations argue that ritual was the key.<sup>4</sup> Although China has produced great generals such as Zhuge Liang (A.D. 181–234) and Yue Fei (1103–1142), their classical cults differ in important ways from the Western-style celebration of heroic martialism, for example, of Alexander the Great.<sup>5</sup> The reasons are both philosophical and social. Early Chinese thinkers tended not to separate military issues from other concerns but rather to merge them into larger questions of society and order in which primary attention was given to the search for moral means to alleviate conflict with the least expenditure of energy.<sup>6</sup> In the Warring States period and early imperial China, “the man . . . of combat was a suspect and dangerous figure who fell outside of human society.”<sup>7</sup> The greatest Chinese military theorists scorned the use of violence, although their Western equivalents saw it as absolutely central in war. Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) in *On War* called war “an act of force” and used the word *Gewalt* (power, force) eight times in the second and third paragraphs of Chapter 1 alone, while Sun Zi (fl. B.C. 500) by contrast used the word *li* (force) but nine times in all of the *Bingfa* (Art of War).<sup>8</sup>

The social organization of violence in China has clearly reflected these deep cultural differences. Armies there have generally been bureaucratic, with high command positions going to civilian officials. In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), for example, Wang Yue (1426–1499), famous commander of daring mounted raids deep into the steppe, was a Confucian scholar who had earned the coveted civil *jinshi* degree in 1451 and not its far-less-honored military counterpart.<sup>9</sup> Except in periods of dynastic transition, warlord-like figures have been rare in China, and for these (the *jiedushi* of the late Tang dynasty, for example), there is no general term in the traditional historical vocabulary. As Mary Wright has pointed out, even in the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), when huge personal forces were raised to combat the great rebellions, they functioned as “regionally based national armies.” Far from being proto-warlords, their leaders placed national

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, Hans H. Gerth, trans. and ed., C. K. Yang, intro. (New York, 1951), 30.

<sup>4</sup> See Kwang-chih Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

<sup>5</sup> For the pervasive influence of the Alexandrine model in the West, see John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> See Christopher C. Rand, “Chinese Military Thought and Philosophical Taoism,” *Monumenta serica*, 34 (1979–80): 171–218; “The Role of Military Thought in Early Chinese Intellectual History” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany, N.Y., 1990), 225.

<sup>8</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, indexed edn., Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed. and trans. (Princeton, N.J., 1984), 75; *Sun-tzu on the Art of War—The Oldest Military Treatise in the World*, Lionel Giles, ed. and trans. (London, 1910).

<sup>9</sup> *Mingshi* (Beijing, 1974), 171: 4570–77.

higher than regional interests, often incurring the ire of local elites, as Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) did in Jiangxi.<sup>10</sup>

But, after the abdication of the Qing in 1912, the situation began to change. In 1916, provincial military commanders acquired the title *dujun*, literally, “supervisor of military affairs.” To a Chinese, even this term still expressed an understanding of the relationship of the military to politics that was rooted in the dynastic past: a *dujun* was a supervisor and by no means an independent “lord.” Understanding this, most *dujuns* sought legitimacy not from their military charisma, if any, but rather from pretended civilian and scholarly virtues. Modern writers accustomed to speaking of *junfa* in the 1910s will be surprised by how long the word *dujun* continued to be used in China: well into what today is called the “warlord” period. When Zhang Xun (1854–1923) attempted a restoration of the Manchus in July of 1917, for example, the progressive journal *Xinqingnian* framed its comment in terms of the *dujun* system. A six-page article denounced the machinations of the northern military leaders in damning terms—but without using the word *junfa*.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the denunciation by Liang Shuming (1893–1988) of the abuses of Duan Qirui’s (1865–1936) forces in Hunan does not use the term, although his biographer speaks of “warlord troops” when describing what Liang wrote.<sup>12</sup> Well into the 1920s, critics directed their ire against *dujuns*: for those opposed to military depredations, “feidu caibing” (abolish the *dujuns* and reduce the troops) was the rallying cry.<sup>13</sup>

IN THE WEST, THE CHINESE WORD *dujun*—or *tuchün* in its more familiar Wade-Giles form—was also widely used. But it became current at a time when the term warlord was also common. “Warlord” had entered English vocabulary in the nineteenth century: Ralph Waldo Emerson used it in a passage that described how, in the English aristocracy, “piracy and war gave place to trade, politics, and letters; the war-lord to the law-lord; the law-lord to the merchant and the mill-owner; but the privilege was kept, whilst the means of obtaining it were changed.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time in Germany, the old term *Kriegsherr* was coming into new currency in connection with debates about the constitutional limits of monarchical authority in Prussia. Both as king of Prussia and German emperor, William I claimed that being *Oberster Kriegsherr* gave him absolute and direct authority over the military without parliamentary or ministerial rights of co-determination.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism* (Stanford, Calif., 1957), 221, emphasis added. David Pong, “The Income and Military Expenditure of Kiangsi Province in the Last Years (1860–1864) of the Taiping Rebellion,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26 (November 1966): 49–65, cited in Harold Z. Schiffrin, “Military and Politics in China: Is the Warlord Model Pertinent?” *Asia Quarterly*, 3 (1975): 196–97.

<sup>11</sup> “Dujun chengbing yu fubi,” *Xinqingnian*, 3 (August 1917): 561–67.

<sup>12</sup> Liang Shuming, *Shuming saqian wenlu* (1924; rpt. edn., Taipei, 1972), 39–56, quoted in Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1979), 60 n. 56.

<sup>13</sup> He Xiya, “Jiazi dazhanhou quanguo jundui zhi diaocha,” *Dongfang zazhi*, 22 (1925): 103–04.

<sup>14</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (1856), in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *The Harvard Classics* (New York, 1909), 5: 419; *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1971), 2: 3688.

<sup>15</sup> See A. Lawrence Lowell, *Governments and Parties in Continental Europe*, 2 vols. (London, 1896), 1: 272.

Nineteenth-century popular culture provided images for the words. The first embryonic sketches of what would eventually become the full-blown Western warlord seem to have flowed from the pen of Honoré Daumier beginning in the 1850s (Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> And there was the musical stage, in particular, Jacques Offenbach's operetta, *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), whose London success stimulated Richard D'Oyly Carte to form his company. It portrayed the forces of a "joke German principality . . . led by a joke German general called Boum, as incapable as he was fearless."<sup>17</sup> Applied to China, such images contributed to a stereotypical Western description of wars among the *dujuns*: mercenary in purpose, reliant on ritual rather than real battle, and preferring "silver bullets" (bribes) to the genuine article. Seen from the West, Chinese wars were "Celestial Opera Bouffe," in which "one wonders whether one has not, somehow or other, fallen into the middle of a new Gilbert and Sullivan opera where presently the painted general will elope with the painted Mimi, and the soldiers will all march in with parasols over their heads and sing the chorus."<sup>18</sup>

Such images of Western warfare perished on the western front. With the advent of World War I, German generals were no longer even remotely ridiculous. Considering the carnage, many asked and answered, as did Charles Edward Russell, "What man is to blame for all this? The War Lord with his overweening ambitions."<sup>19</sup> Russell was referring to the kaiser himself, but the term quickly became generalized, and "warlords" became a sinister category (see Figure 2).<sup>20</sup> The term was applied to China as well, although still rather mockingly. Explaining the civil war of 1922, *The New York Times* wrote, "Each provincial Tuchun or Military Governor is a little or big war lord with his own army and his own laws; and his regard for the Peking government is proportioned inversely to the size of his army and his distance from the capital."<sup>21</sup>

Bloody internecine fighting in 1924, however, began to challenge the Western assumption that Chinese warfare was all an elaborate joke. Unlike some of the earlier encounters among *dujuns*, which had to a degree been ritual affairs, the wars of 1924 were serious business. They began with a struggle between Jiangsu and Zhejiang for control of Shanghai, which expanded into a showdown in Beijing and the north as well, the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. All the rolling stock in north China was pressed into service to carry men and weapons to the front. Mines and barbed-wire protected entrenched positions; armored trains and

<sup>16</sup> Among the examples found in Loys Delteil, *Le Peintre-Graveur illustré: The Graphic Works of Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Artists: An Illustrated Catalog* (New York, 1969), vol. 29, Daumier, see in particular "Le Général Guilay taillant ses ennemis" (1859), vol. 17, no. 3172; "David et Goliath," vol. 16, no. 2521; "Tableau . . . de l'empire de Russie," vol. 16, no. 2522; "A L'Instar de Pantin," vol. 29, no. 3740.

<sup>17</sup> Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune, 1870–1871* (Harmondsworth, 1981), 27–28.

<sup>18</sup> Ethel Andrews Murphy, "Celestial Opera Bouffe," *Travel Magazine* (Floral Park, N.Y.), 40 (April 1923): 15.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Edward Russell, "Who Made This War?" *Pearson's Magazine*, 32 (November 1914): 514.

<sup>20</sup> "It is not . . . universal training to defend the country that creates German militarism. It is the enormous body of officers . . . [who] constitute a military caste that is associated with the surviving institutions of autocracy and feudalism"; "The Progress of the World," in *The American Review of Reviews*, 50 (September 1914): 266; see also "The Lorelei" (Figure 3).

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times*, December 31, 1922, viii.12/13, quoted in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2: 3688.



ACTUALITES.

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Tableau politique et social de l'empire de Russie.

FIGURE 1: Two early works of Honoré Daumier, "Le Général Giulay taillant ses ennemis," 1859, and "Tableau politique et social de l'empire de Russie," 1854. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cat. H.D. 2992, 3019.



FIGURE 2: Prototype of Prussian warlord by Daumier, 1869, "A L'Instar de Pantin": the strangling of Baden. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cat. H.D. 3325.

military aircraft were employed, and artillery fire was punishing. Both sides used machine-gun corps to kill their own troops if they retreated without order.<sup>22</sup> Casualties were extremely heavy. Economic, social, and political life was thrown into deep confusion.

Even foreign journalists recognized the change. In September 1924, "A

<sup>22</sup> Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Warlord Politics in China 1916–1928* (Stanford, Calif., 1976), 139–40.



FIGURE 3: An American view of militarism. *The American Review of Reviews*, 50 (September 1914): 266.

"Correspondent" set out from Shanghai, as many a treaty-port type had in years past, for a picturesque day watching the Chinese skirmish. But, when he and his unwilling driver drew near to the fighting, they found not diversion but corpses, casualties, and personal peril: "the appalling horrors of war."<sup>23</sup>

These wars, and even worse fighting in following years, prepared the way in China for the post-World War I European understanding of war and European

<sup>23</sup> "Shanghai Battle Sketches," *The Living Age*, 323, no. 4191 (November 1, 1924): 235-39.

conventions for depicting it. According to the Europeans, violence could be either meaningless, as in the warfare of the trenches, or transformative and redemptive, as in the revolutionary wars that followed. The process is clearly evident in the increasing displacement of the word *dujun* by *junfa*, until, by the end of the 1920s, the new term, and the new way of thinking that came with it, became virtually standard.<sup>24</sup>

The first Chinese to use the new word was probably Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), who published a paragraph titled “*” (Down with warlords) on December 28, 1918, in *Meizhou pinglun* (Weekly Critic), a journal he had founded in collaboration with Li Dazhao (1889–1927).<sup>25</sup> Although rooted in a leftist understanding of events in China (Chen and Li were early Marxists), the term gained wider currency: at the beginning of the First Zhili-Fengtian War (April 28–May 4, 1922), the rival commanders Wu Peifu (1874–1939) and Zhang Zuolin (1872–1928) denounced one another as *junfa*.<sup>26</sup> In July 1922, the Second Congress of the Chinese Communist party explained the new concept. A resolution stated that, after World War I, European capital needed new outlets; this would intensify competition among imperialists, and foreign powers would therefore attempt to bolster their positions in China by sponsoring local warlords. The resolution called upon the Chinese people to “overthrow the feudal warlords and stop civil wars, so that internal peace can be established within China.”<sup>27</sup>*

In 1924, the term was also used by Zhang Junmai (1886–1969) in the “Six Lectures on Internal War,” which he presented to the National Political University in Shanghai. Zhang’s analysis was rather different from Chen’s and that of the Communists: he focused on the military basis of the power of the *junfa* and never mentioned the idea that they might be products of capitalism and imperialism. Their cure, he argued, was the creation of popularly based militias.<sup>28</sup>

The term *junfa* also began to be used by Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925). For much of his career, Sun had based his hopes for power not only on his political program but also on military maneuvers, for example, in his intrigues with the American would-be military hero Homer Lea and his attempts to ally with various leading militarists.<sup>29</sup> But, by late 1924, Sun and his Guomindang party were changing their approach. Their propaganda increasingly stressed anti-militarism and anti-imperialism, and, when Sun lectured on the *Sanminzhuyi*, he became “more militantly nationalistic than before.” The northern expedition proclaimed on September 18, 1924, was directed “not only against [Cao Kun] and [Wu Peifu], but against all warlords and against the imperialism which supported them. Once imperialism had been overthrown, China would escape its position as a semicolonial and create a free and independent state.” Such analysis was new for Sun.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Jerome Ch’en, *The Military-Gentry Coalition: China under the Warlords* (Toronto, 1979), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Chen Duxiu, “*,” in *Chen Duxiu wenzhang xuandian* (Beijing, 1984), 1: 312.*

<sup>26</sup> *Xinhaigemeng yanjiulunji*, 2: 146, 160, cited in Ch’en, *Military-Gentry Coalition*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Second Congress, held in Shanghai July 16–23, 1922. Wang Jianmin, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Shigao* (Taibei, n.d.), 1: 58–59, trans. in Dun J. Li, *Modern China: From Mandarin to Commissar* (New York, 1978), 197–98.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang Junmai, *Guonei zhanzheng liujiang* (Shanghai, 1924).

<sup>29</sup> See Eugene Anschel, *Homer Lea, Sun Yat-sen, and the Chinese Revolution* (New York, 1984); C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen: Frustrated Patriot* (New York, 1976).

<sup>30</sup> Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen*, 34–35, 257–58. The proclamation of the northern expedition of 1924 is

By 1926, the word *junfa* was common enough to prompt discussion in the press of what it meant and thus, by implication, of how the military and political situation in China should be understood. The word turned out to mean different, and not always compatible, things to different people. One question concerned the social base of "warlords": were they figures who ultimately derived their power from control of the means of coercion and therefore had little connection with the rest of society? Or were they closely tied to capitalists, the gentry, or some other class? Second, were they old or new? Had "warlords" always existed in China? Or were they an unprecedented phenomenon, perhaps created by internal and external changes over the preceding century?<sup>31</sup>

In February 1926, an article appeared called "What Is a *Junfa*?" by Wang Jizhan. Wang argued that "warlordism" was in fact traditional; during transitional periods such as the Warring States or the Three Kingdoms, it was common for soldiers to base themselves in parts of China while contending for control of the whole.<sup>32</sup> But Gao Yihan, a political scientist from Peking University who published his analysis of the *junfa* in the same journal, disagreed and pointed out the importance of the issue to all who hoped for revolutionary change. He argued that if "warlordism" was simply a standard aspect of transition between dynasties, it followed that the present period of disorder would likewise be followed by yet another traditional-style Chinese regime. Since that was undesirable, the key question became how to end a period of "warlordism" in such a way that a revolutionary new regime, and not simply another dynasty, would emerge. Many revolutionaries had been trying to work with progressive warlords to promote change. Gao argued that this approach could never succeed. What was needed was a new kind of military man: someone who was a master of the techniques of warfare but a revolutionary and not a *junfa* at heart. Gao believed that Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975), just then taking center stage in China, was such a man: a "soldier but not a warlord" (*jun er fei fa*).<sup>33</sup>

Gao's article elicited two detailed responses from Wu Zihui (1864–1953) who was, like him, a revolutionary but who nevertheless disagreed. Wu found Gao's categories too exclusive: the *junfa* were not all as bad as he painted them nor was Chiang as good. Furthermore, to confront all the *junfa* directly was probably impossible militarily. It would be much wiser to try to work with them and "transform warlords into soldiers" (*hua fa wei jun*).<sup>34</sup>

Gao's idea that Chiang was the "soldier but not a warlord" who could accomplish this revolution seemed to be confirmed during the first stages of the

found in Luo Jialun, ed., *Geming wenxian* (Taibei, 1953- ), 10: 1489–91; and in Milton J. Hsieh, *The Kuomintang: Selected Historical Documents 1894–1969* (New York, 1970), 87–90.

<sup>31</sup> Western theorists faced the same problems. Karl Liebknecht (see below) could never decide whether militarism was a Prussian tradition that had survived into the modern age or the product of very recent industrialism.

<sup>32</sup> Wang Jizhan, "Junfa shi shenmo dongxi?" *Jingbao*, February 20, 1926. I have not yet been able to consult the original text and rely on extensive quotations in Wu Zihui, "Junfa wenti da Yihan xiasheng," part 2, *Xiandai pinglun*, 3, 64 (1926): 225.

<sup>33</sup> Gao Yihan, "Pingmin geming de mudi yu shouduan," *Xiandai pinglun*, 3, 53 (1926): 2–3.

<sup>34</sup> On Wu Zihui, see Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York, 1990), 60–72 and *passim*.

successful Northern Expedition (1926–1928), as the Guomindang army surged north. The propaganda accompanying the campaign stressed that the “revolutionary” Guomindang armies differed in their essence from the “warlord” armies they were steadily defeating, and this view initially achieved wide credence.

After Chiang crushed the Communists in Shanghai in April 1927, however, his adversaries began to attach the label *junfa* to him and his regime as well, leading to division within the ranks of the triumphant revolution. Thus in October 1928, Mao Zedong called Chiang’s government “the new warlords of the Guomindang,” writing that, like the old warlords, the new ones could not hope to maintain peace, for their power remained based on “the comprador class in the cities and the landlord class in the countryside.” This view has remained standard in much Chinese scholarship ever since.<sup>35</sup>

Such accusations outraged Guomindang loyalists. But both Communists and Nationalists had by this time adopted the new political language of invective, and, when Hu Hanmin (1879–1936) responded indignantly, it was from within an intellectual system that included the category of “warlord.” The problem was not its general validity but rather its misapplication. Real warlords, according to Hu, were only those who relied on such “counterrevolutionary forces” as corrupt officials, local bullies, oppressive gentry, and foreign imperialism.<sup>36</sup> In the space of seven years, the term *junfa* had come to define for many one of the fundamental problems of Chinese politics and society.

**WHERE HAD THE TERM COME FROM?** In its modern form, it was not Chinese in origin, although the characters of which it is composed are both ancient: *jun*, as defined by Giles, is “an army, according to the *Chou Ritual*, of 12,500 men,” while *fa* means “the left-hand entrance of a triple-gate, as opposed to [yue] the right-hand entrance.”<sup>37</sup> *Junfa* as “military merit” was used in the Tang. But the compound *junfa* in the sense current today is not found in the classical Chinese vocabulary.<sup>38</sup>

It was the Japanese who grasped the linguistic possibilities offered by the suffix *fa*, which in Japanese is read *batsu* and means “a clique, a faction, a coterie, a clan.” They used it to create a whole family of terms.<sup>39</sup> In addition to *monbatsu* (in Chinese, *menfa*), meaning “pedigree or lineage,” Japanese speak of academic cliques or *gakubatsu* (*xuefa*), regional factions based on the *han* or feudal domains and thus called *hanbatsu* (*fanfa*), and, most familiar to Western readers, financial

<sup>35</sup> Mao Zedong, “Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking, 1967), 1: 63–64. An example of the continued use of the term is Zhang Tongxin, ed., *Guomindang xin junfa hunluan shilue* (Ha-er-bin, 1982). Han Jianfu, “Zhongguo jindai junfazhi yanjiuzhong de jige wenti,” *Guangdong shehui kexue*, 3 (1988): 69–76, reviews much of the historiography.

<sup>36</sup> Luo Jialun, ed., *Geming wenxian* (Taibei, 1953–), 14: 564, cited by Ch'en, *Military-Gentry Coalition*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert A. Giles, *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, 2d edn., rev. and enl. (1912; rpt. edn., Taipei, 1972), 399, 412.

<sup>38</sup> It is not found in *Ciyuan* (Beijing, 1983). Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai Kanwa Jiten* (Tokyo, 1955–60), 10: 996, lists one example from the Tang, whose sense is quite different.

<sup>39</sup> Koh Masuda, ed., *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Tokyo, 1974), 79.

combines, or *zaibatsu* (*caifa*).<sup>40</sup> *Gunbatsu* follows the same pattern, and for the immediate source of the Chinese *junfa* we must look to Japan.<sup>41</sup>

In Japanese, these terms are generally used as collective nouns: thus *gunbatsu* does not mean "a warlord" but rather "the military clique," denoting "army and navy leaders as an independent political grouping."<sup>42</sup> The earliest Chinese usage of the term is similar. In the late 1910s, Chen Duxiu regularly employed not only the term *junfa* but also *caifa*, which was often paired with it in Japanese but which never really caught on in Chinese. And instead of treating *junfa* as plain singular, early writers such as Zhang Junmai (a graduate of Waseda University in Tokyo) used it in its collective, Japanese sense.<sup>43</sup>

But to trace the Chinese term back to Japanese is of only limited use in understanding the origin of the idea of the warlord. For the Japanese *gunbatsu* is itself a new word, not used in the Meiji period or earlier but only a few years before it entered China, in the Taishō era (1912–1926).<sup>44</sup> During this time, when the Japanese emperor was weak and the army and navy grew strong in the face of increasing security threats, the military cliques (whose origins lay partially in residual regional loyalties of the *hanbatsu*) began to grow in influence.<sup>45</sup> Some Japanese saw parallels between their own situation and that of Prussia, and they began to import, for analytical purposes, the concept of "militarism" then being developed in Europe.

The word "militarist" had long served in the West as the focus of a discussion on the origins of war and, specifically, on the relationship between the military and the civil, or between force and society.<sup>46</sup> As the debate developed, it gradually divided into two schools. One argued that the military and its technology were the source of militarism and believed it could be avoided by democratizing the military by means of militia organization. This was the view of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Such views fed into subsequent argument over standing armies, which Immanuel Kant and Johann Fichte criticized as "threats to peace and economic prosperity."<sup>47</sup> By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this school had developed the theory that militarism was, in the words of Herbert Spencer, ultimately "a process of regimentation . . . primarily taking place in the army, [which] secondarily affects the whole community."<sup>48</sup> A generation later, Norman Angell, building on this approach, contrasted the non-military industrialism "which has . . . given us Canada and the United States" with "stupid and sordid

<sup>40</sup> *Kenkyusha*, 1125, 310, 393, 2037.

<sup>41</sup> *Kenkyusha*, 354. For additional information on *gunbatsu*, see Janet Hunter, comp., *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), 129, 218; *Nihon rekishi daijiten* (Tokyo, 1956–60), 4: 181. In "The Ideas and Ideals of a Warlord: Ch'en Chiung-ming (1873–1933)," *Papers on China*, 16 (1962): 198, Winston Hsieh stated that the Chinese term *junfa* is borrowed from Japanese but supplied no source. Although *junfa* is not listed in the standard dictionary of borrowed words in modern Chinese (Gao Mingkai and Liu Zhengtan, eds., *Xiandai Hanyu Wailaizi Yanjiu* [Beijing, 1958]), nevertheless, as is shown below, Hsieh was certainly correct.

<sup>42</sup> Hunter, *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History*, 129.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang, *Guonei zhanzheng liujiang*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> Yoshio Matsushita, *Meiji no guntai* (Tokyo, 1963), 183–84.

<sup>45</sup> Yoshio, *Meiji no guntai*, 183–84.

<sup>46</sup> For an excellent review, see Volker R. Berghahn, *Militarism: The History of an International Debate 1861–1979* (New York, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> Berghahn, *Militarism*, 8–9.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Berghahn, *Militarism*, 11.

gold-braid" militarism which has "given us Venezuela and Santo Domingo." A related approach, one that opposes militarism not to pacifism but rather to "civilianism" is found in the work of Alfred Vagts.<sup>49</sup> But such distinctions between militarism and civilianism, or militarist and non-militarist industrialism, would never have been accepted by Marxist thinkers in the second stream. They rejected the idea, implicit in the first approach, that violence had autonomy as a causal force and looked instead for an explanation that found the origin of militarism in the economic system of a society. Their views gained adherents particularly after World War I.

The autonomy of violence was debated in the famous polemic between the German philosopher Karl Eugen Dühring and Friedrich Engels, who attacked him in the *Anti-Dühring* (1894). Dühring had argued that force was an independent factor creating oppression: without a sword, as he put it, Robinson Crusoe could never have enslaved his man Friday. Engels' argument that even slavery was purely economic in its origins proved unsatisfactory, and the problems of "the idealism of violence" and the nature of "militarism" have haunted Marxist thought ever since. V. I. Lenin added little to the debate: the term "militarism" occurs in only fifty-nine passages in his collected works, while Leon Trotsky limited himself to comments on "Bonapartism."<sup>50</sup> It fell to a younger generation of Marxists to pursue the issue, and by the 1920s they had made substantial progress.

Karl Liebknecht undertook to make a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis that would "lay bare the deepest, most hidden roots of capitalism" by looking at "militarism"; Rosa Luxemburg, who as early as 1899 had called "militarism" "the strongest pillar of [capitalist] class rule," improved on Liebknecht's effort with *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), which introduced the idea of arms races as important to capitalist development. Further refinements followed. The tendency of war to break out despite its destruction of many of the capitalists who were argued to be fostering it was explained by means of Rudolf Hilferding's concept of the role of "finance capital." What emerged was the argument that the various economic stages of development produced their characteristic military formations and that, as Nikolai Bukharin argued, "the rule of finance capital implies both imperialism and militarism."<sup>51</sup>

Such analyses exerted a powerful appeal for certain Japanese trying to understand the politics of their own society. The word "militarism," translated as

<sup>49</sup> Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage*, 3d edn. (London, 1911), 187, quoted in Berghahn, *Militarism*, 21 n. 36; Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (London, 1938), 15, quoted in Berghahn, 9 n. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri Ts.K. K.P.S.S., comp., *Spravochnyi tom k polnomu sobraniiu sochineneii V. I. Lenina*, Part 1 (Moscow, 1978), 384; Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Max Eastman, trans., Vol. 2: *The Attempted Counter-Revolution* (New York, 1932), 136. See also Bernard Semmel, ed., *Marxism and the Science of War* (New York, 1981).

<sup>51</sup> K. Liebknecht, "Militarismus und Antimilitarismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der internationalen Jugendbewegung," rpt. in Volker R. Berghahn, ed., *Militarismus* (Cologne, 1975), quoted in Berghahn, *Militarism*, 22; R. Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1970), 1.1: 446–66; see also *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals* (Berlin, 1913), quoted in Berghahn, *Militarism*, 24–25; R. Hilferding, *Finance Capital* (Vienna, 1910); and N. I. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (1917; rpt. edn., New York, 1966), 127, quoted in Berghahn, *Militarism*, 26. See also Martin Shaw, ed., *War, State and Society* (New York, 1984). How seriously the Chinese take such questions is indicated by the recent publication of a history of the development of the concept of imperialism in the West; Cai Zhongxing, *Diguo zhuyi lilun fazhan shi* (Shanghai, 1987).

*gunkokushugi*, is found in Japanese sources by 1911.<sup>52</sup> It quickly took root in the intellectual soil of Japan, giving rise to the strong, indigenous school of theorists including Eitarō Noro, Moritarō Yamada, and Hisao Ōtsuka.<sup>53</sup> And it was from such intellectual milieus in Japan that the concepts of militarism and warlordism, along with Marxist concepts more broadly, first entered China.<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned earlier, perhaps the first use of the term *junfa* in modern Chinese was by Chen Duxiu. Chen was an influential figure in the intellectual life of China during this period. A prolific essayist, and among the first Chinese to study and to popularize Marxist ideas, he served as dean of the College of Letters of Peking University from 1917 to 1919, editor of the progressive journal *Xinqingnian*, and in 1920–1921 was instrumental in creating the Chinese Communist party, of which he was the first chairman. Beginning in the 1910s, he took an interest in questions of the military and society. During World War I, Chen had watched Germany closely: the string of German victories in late 1915 led him to hope that that country, “a newly developed nation, could provide leadership to the colonial peoples of the world.”<sup>55</sup> But Germany disappointed him, and he increasingly adopted the ideas of the German opposition, which he expressed through the vocabulary developed in Japanese for the same purpose. His essays of the time frequently speak of “militarism” (*junguozhuyi*, a recognized loan-word from Japanese).<sup>56</sup>

Chen appears to use the word *junfa* first in 1918, as part of a fascinating and revealing essay written in connection with the defeat of Germany in the European war. When news of the allied victory reached China, celebrations began in many cities. In Tianjin, for example, joyful students constructed a float called a “national spirit boat” [*guohunzhou*.]<sup>57</sup> Two students, one made up as Guan Yu (d. A.D. 219), the general who came in the Qing dynasty to be venerated as the Chinese god of war, and the other as Yue Fei, the patriotic hero of the Song, sat in this boat as it was carried through the streets of the city to the cheers of the populace. This was a celebration that drew on a traditional Chinese vocabulary of martiality: like patriots in Europe who expressed their understanding of the Great War by referring to the age of chivalry and knighthood, the Chinese students of Tianjin looked to the past. Evidently, they saw nothing inherently wrong with warfare or the military per se; they were only concerned that their cause and their nation should be victorious.

Chen found the activities of the Tianjin students deeply discouraging, and he contrasted them with what their Japanese counterparts had done. In Tokyo, five

<sup>52</sup> Tadao Kabashima, *Meiji Taishō shingō zakugo jiten* (Tokyo, 1984), 109.

<sup>53</sup> On this vast topic, see Germaine A. Houston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton, N.J., 1986).

<sup>54</sup> On the introduction of Marxism into China, see Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978), esp. 21–53.

<sup>55</sup> Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu: Founder of the Chinese Communist Party* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), 108–09.

<sup>56</sup> *Chen Duxiu wenzhang xuandian*, 1: 129, 195, and *passim*; Gao and Liu, *Xiandai Hanyu wailaici yanjiu*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> The idea of *guohun* or “national soul” was an important feature of new Chinese patriotism, which was developed under the Qing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Laurence A. Schneider, “National Essence and the New Intelligentsia,” in *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China*, Charlotte Furth, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 59.

thousand students from Keiō University had marched through the streets to celebrate the victory. But they had borne no images of past Japanese heroes. Rather, they carried lanterns and a huge banner on which were written the three characters *tō gunbatsu* (Down with Warlords).

On the surface, the “warlords” that the Japanese students were criticizing were those of Germany, just defeated. But, as Chen and everyone else understood, the real targets were not German but Japanese “militarists.” In the Taishō period, the influence of military figures in Japanese politics had come under increasing attack. Chen Duxiu mentioned two in particular, Nogi Maresuke (1849–1912), who had commanded the imperial guard at the siege of Port Arthur, and Tōgō Heichahirō, the victor of Tsushima.<sup>58</sup> Chen could not help but be disheartened by the contrast between the two groups of students: the Chinese were still “worshipping” Guan Yu and Yue Fei, “the Chinese equivalents of Nogi and Tōgō” while the Japanese, by contrast, understood that they were all “militarists” and therefore enemies of the people.<sup>59</sup>

Chen’s presentation of these two vignettes and his interpretation of them strongly suggest that the *junfa* vocabulary was first developed in Japan and then imported into China. But, more important, Chen’s analysis of the Japanese victory celebrations and his comparison of them with the Chinese underscore the fact that the idea of militarism and of the warlord, as Chen wanted them to be understood, were in no sense indigenous to China. They might be powerful tools for understanding Chinese society, but they were not among the categories Chinese traditionally employed for that purpose. To Chen, the new vocabulary was part of a new and different way of thinking about war and violence.

THIS NEW ANALYTICAL APPROACH gained strength in China during the early 1920s. The Japanese-derived *junfa* vocabulary entered the mainstream more and more. European representations of militarists were published in China: a striking example is a cartoon from the German satirical journal *Kladderadatsch* (1848–1944) depicting two Chinese generals as puppets of foreign powers (Figure 4). This image was reproduced in 1925 in the highly influential *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany [1904–1948]).<sup>60</sup> Also important were influences from the Soviet Union. The Russian civil war in particular provided many parallels to the Chinese internal conflicts of the 1920s. Russia had been as divided as “warlord” China (at one point in 1918, nineteen different self-proclaimed governments had been active), yet the Bolsheviks had ultimately imposed unity.<sup>61</sup>

Quite naturally, then, the model for the anti-“warlord” propaganda work of the Guomindang army during the Northern Expedition came partly from the USSR.

<sup>58</sup> Nogi, called the “last samurai,” was subsequently military councillor and, from 1907, head of the Peers’ School. Tōgō served as chief of the naval general staff (1905–1909), supreme military councillor, admiral of the fleet (1913), and supervisor of the crown prince’s studies. See the entries in Hunter, *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History*, 150, 227.

<sup>59</sup> Chen Duxiu, “*” (December 29, 1918), in *Chen Duxiu wenzhang xuandian*, 1: 312; originally published in *Meizhou pinglun*, no. 2.*

<sup>60</sup> *Dongfang zazhi*, 22 (1925): 13.

<sup>61</sup> Adam B. Ulam, *A History of Soviet Russia* (New York, 1976), 34.

# (一) 國際時事漫畫

柏林 “Kladderadatsch” 報謂我國內戰表面上  
軍閥為權利而弄兵，內幕却完全受日美兩國的操縱。

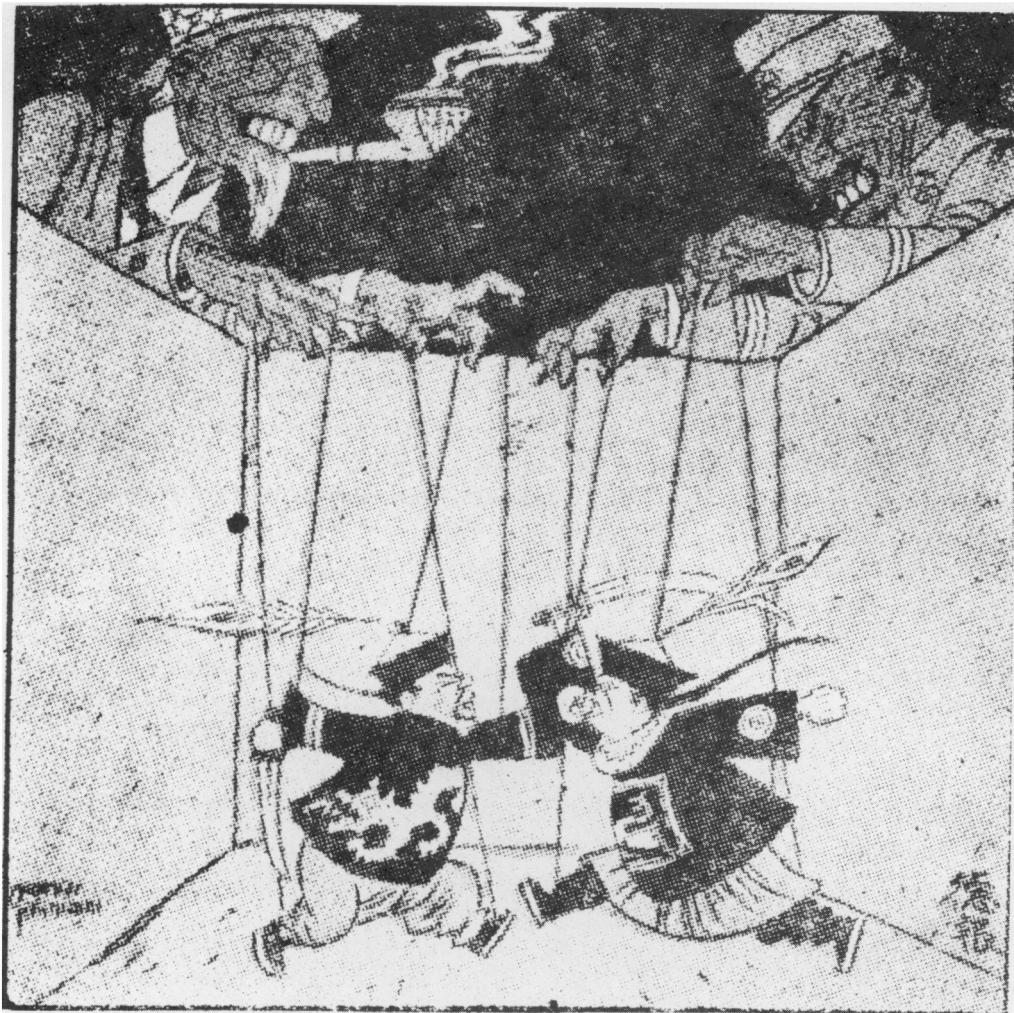


FIGURE 4: Cartoon from *Kladderadatsch* reproduced in *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), 32 (1925): 13.

The Bolsheviks portrayed the White generals just like Chinese “warlords”: militarists supported by prosperous peasants, capitalists, and foreign powers. Aleksandr Kolchak, who had proclaimed a Siberian government in 1918, was described in the first sentences of the Karakhan Declaration of July 25, 1919, as a “counterrevolutionary tyrant who depends upon military might and foreign capital for the strengthening of his own position in Russia.”<sup>62</sup> V. D. Vilenskii-Sibiriakov, an early Comintern representative who arrived in China in 1919, had

<sup>62</sup> Wang Jianmin, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Shigao* (Taipei, n.d.), 1: 21, translated in Li, *Modern China*, 187.

worked against Kolchak and the allied intervention in Siberia, and he understandably saw the Chinese situation as parallel.<sup>63</sup>

Chinese visual images of “warlords” also owe much to Soviet depictions of the Civil War period. Deni (Viktor Nikolaievich Denisov, 1893–1946) portrayed Kolchak, with flag and sword, receiving the tribute of the kulaks and the bourgeoisie (1919).<sup>64</sup> D. S. Moor (Dmitrii Strakhevich Orlov, 1883–1946) captured the idea that the “militarist” had no power of his own in “Chortova kukla” or “devil puppet” (1920) in which the terrifying figure of the anti-Bolshevik General P. N. Wrangel in the first frame is revealed in the second to be no more than a mask on a stick with a uniform draped over it, all held up by figures representing the Entente (Figure 5).<sup>65</sup> The clearest immediate model for China, however, is Boris Efimov (1900– ), long a cartoonist for official Soviet publications, whose style was widely imitated. Efimov’s visual attacks on the French occupation of the Ruhr and on the Romanian annexation of Bessarabia may have helped create a representational vocabulary for Chinese irredentism, while his sketch of Marshal Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) sharpening his teeth for the USSR presents the prototypical warlord (Figure 6).<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, shifts in the visual depiction of military themes parallel the terminological transition from *dujun* to *junfa* already mentioned. Early Chinese cartoonists seem to have been influenced by the relatively light-hearted humorous broadsheets of the nineteenth century, such as *Le Charivari* and *Puck* (founded in 1876) in New York City. Shen Bochen (1889–1920), for example, whose *Shanghai Puck* had a circulation of more than 10,000 in Shanghai and the Yangzi Valley, was clearly influenced by such Western models.<sup>67</sup> His “Struggle between South and North” (“Nanbei zhi zheng”) published in 1918, for example, shows two soldiers, in Western uniform, confronting each other with sword and bayonet, while standing on a prostrate figure who is in traditional garb, labeled “China” (Figure 7). But while the cartoon makes a political statement, it still has a certain whimsy: it remains a cartoon. *Shanghai Puck* ceased in 1918, Shen died two years later, and Chinese political cartooning declined.

When cartooning revived, it had changed. Although Shen Bochen held strong political views, both the original New York *Puck* and his own unauthorized Shanghai imitation were intended, above all, to be funny. By the mid-1920s, however, much Chinese cartooning had become explicitly a political tool of the left. Thus in 1925, a revolutionary broadsheet (*huabao*) portrayed General Wu Peifu (1874–1939) as a dog, led on a leash by Uncle Sam. Lest anyone miss the point, this was labeled “The truth about imperialism and warlords.”<sup>68</sup> In 1926, the

<sup>63</sup> V. N. Nikiforov, *Sovetskii istoriki o problemakh Kitaia* (Moscow, 1970), 67–68.

<sup>64</sup> *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat iz kolleksiis gosudarstvennoi biblioteki imeni Lenina* (Moscow, 1984), 5; Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven, Conn., 1988), 58.

<sup>65</sup> White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 102.

<sup>66</sup> *Bor: Efimov Karikatura*, L. D. Trotsky, intro. (Moscow, 1924 [Preface, July 20, 1924]), Ruhr, p. 2, Bessarabia, p. 21; Piłsudskii is in L. L. Varshavskii, *Nasha politicheskai karikatura* (Moscow, 1930), 57. In 1920, Piłsudskii had carried out a rapid advance across the Pripyet marshes, checked only at Kiev. When the Soviets counterattacked, he stopped them in the so-called Miracle of the Vistula, and the Bolsheviks were forced to yield their Polish conquests.

<sup>67</sup> See Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhuashi* (Beijing, 1986), 47–56.

<sup>68</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, plate 80.



FIGURE 5: D. S. Moor (Dmitrii Strakhevich Orlov, 1883–1946), “Chortova kukla” (the devil puppet), 1920. In Georg Piltz, *Russland wird rot: Satirische Plakate 1918–1922* (Berlin, 1970), plate 66.



FIGURE 6: Boris Efimov (1900– ), “Pilsudskii tochit zuby na SSSR” (Piłsudski sharpens his teeth for the USSR), 1926. In L. Varshavskii, *Nasha politicheskaiia karikatura* (Moscow, 1980), 57.

political department of the First Corps of the National Revolutionary Army produced a dramatic sketch of warlordism and imperialism being clubbed down by the leader of angry citizens (Figure 8).

An important artist of this revolutionary period was Huang Zhuohua, who served Peng Pai (1896–1929) in the Peasant Movement Training Institute in Guangzhou.<sup>69</sup> In August 1926, a striking trio of his drawings appeared in *The*

<sup>69</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 67–68.

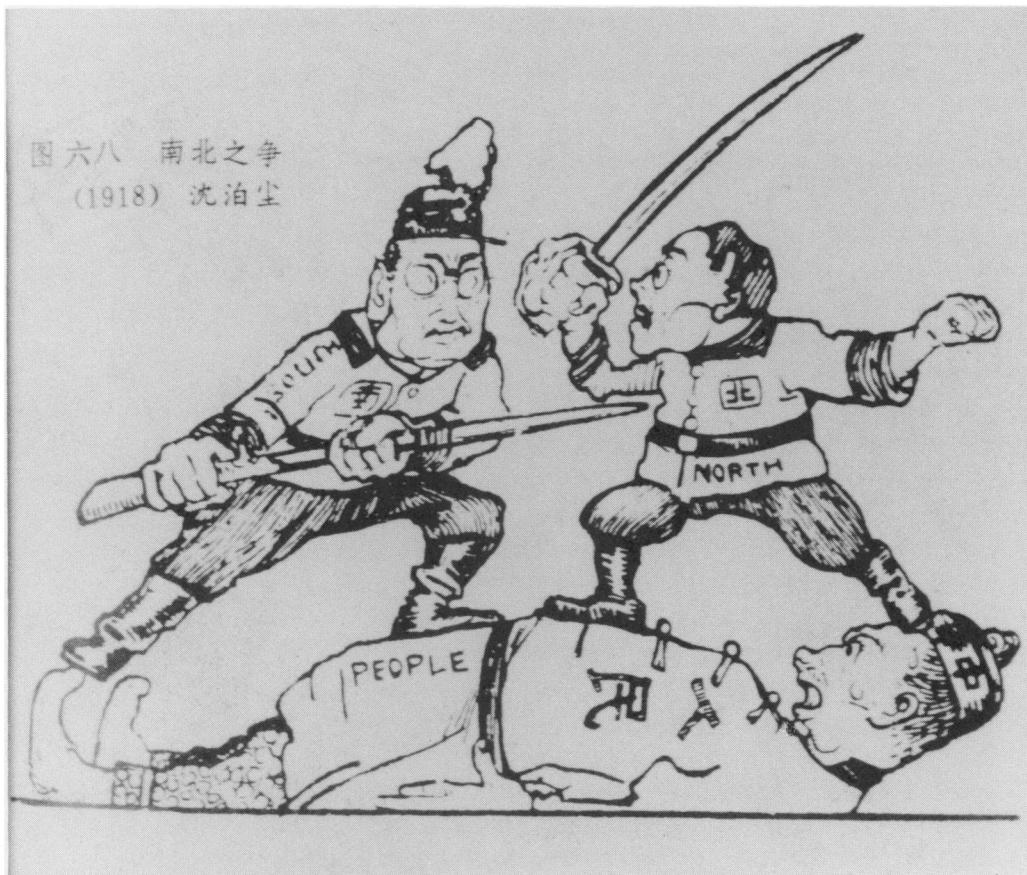


FIGURE 7: "Struggle between North and South," 1918. Characteristic work of Shen Bochen (1889–1920)—satirical and lighthearted but with an unmistakable political message. In Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhuashi* (Beijing, 1986), plate 68.

*Plough (Litou zhoubao)* titled “our past,” “our present,” and “our future.” They showed in succession a mass of people being crushed under a huge boulder on which sat figures labeled “imperialism,” “warlords,” “compradores,” “local bullies,” etc.; the same scene with the people beginning to lift the boulder away and topple their oppressors, and finally, the people triumphant with the former oppressors crushed to the ground.<sup>70</sup>

In 1927, as Chiang Kai-shek turned against his former allies, the Guomindang left and the Communists, he too was labeled a “warlord”—one of the “New Warlords of the Guomindang [*Guomindang xin junfa*].” History had prepared the doom of such traitors, however, and a cartoon of 1927 portrayed a toothless, blindfolded Chiang feeling his own way toward his grave, where a bird sat perched whistling “welcome” (Figure 9).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 67–68, plate 94.

<sup>71</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, plate 97. Strikingly similar in composition to A. A. Radakov's blindfolded figure walking off a cliff, used in a Soviet literacy campaign (1920). See *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat*, 29.

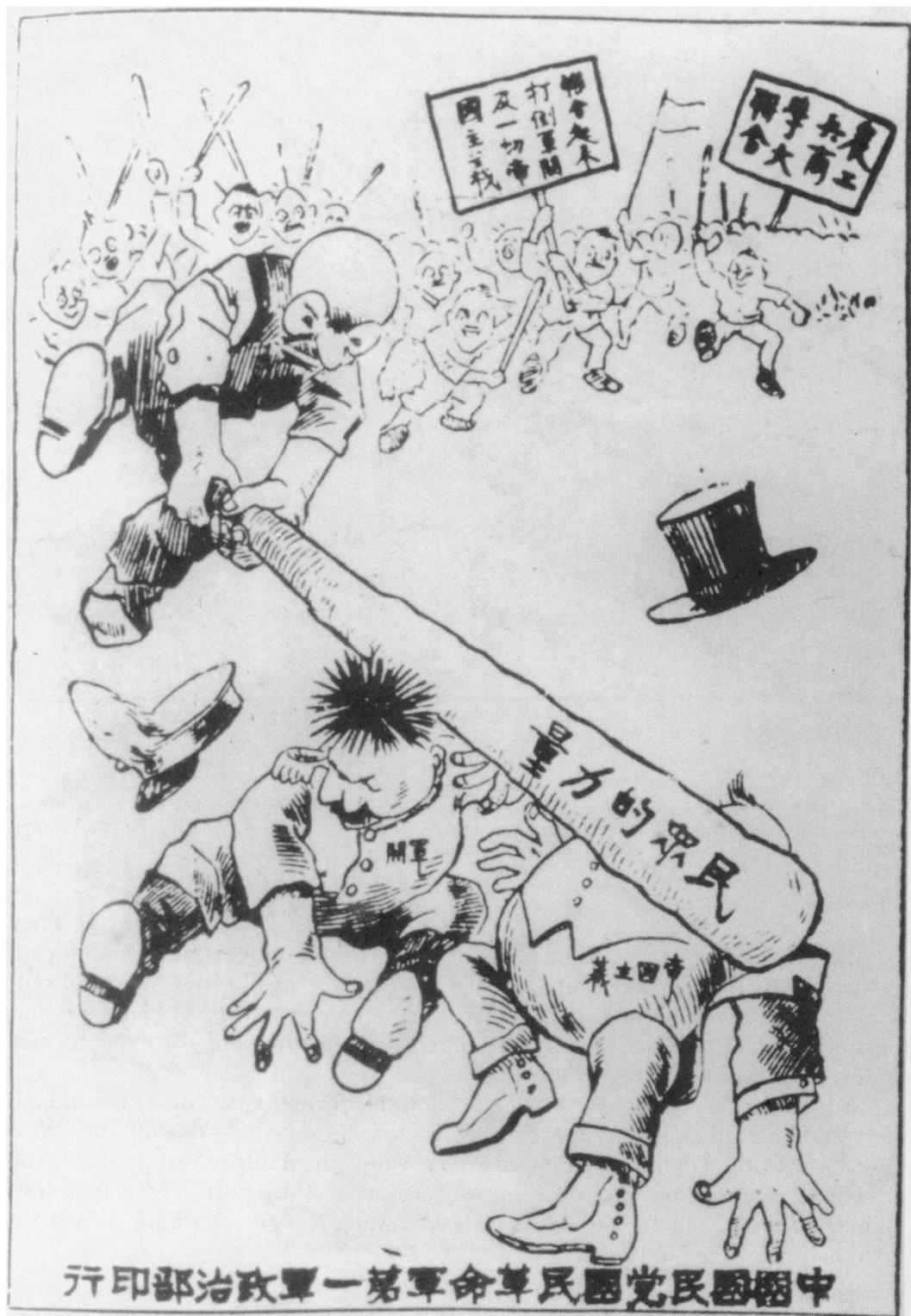


FIGURE 8: Soviet-influenced cartoon, prepared by Guomindang First Army political department, 1926. In Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, plate 95.



图九七 新军阀蒋介石自向坟墓里摸索前行 (1927)

FIGURE 9: Chiang Kai-shek approaches his doom, 1927. In Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, plate 97.

But perhaps the most striking portrayals of war and warlords by this revolutionary generation of cartoon artists in China came from the pen of Huang Wenneng (d. 1934), who drew for the popular and long-established *Dongfang zazhi* and, during the Northern Expedition, worked for the revolutionary forces in police and naval propaganda departments. Huang designed the cover for the special edition of the *Dongfang zazhi* devoted to the incident of May 30, 1925, and his anti-British and anti-American cartooning led to a lawsuit against the magazine.<sup>72</sup> Huang stressed the putative connection between external imperialism and internal warlordism: one cartoon in 1927 depicted four emaciated figures bearing the place-names of the celebrated incidents of the growing unrest—Hankou, Shaji, Nanjing, Wanxian—labeled (in English) “Made in England” under a sign proclaiming the English-brand imperialism shop.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 76–78.

<sup>73</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 108, plate 62.

ALTHOUGH THE CHINESE ADOPTED images, organizations, and rhetoric from Europe and the Soviet Union during the 1920s, they never really adopted the essence of the Marxist understanding of militarism, which saw it as the product of capitalism and imperialism and which thus rejected any suggestion that a militarist held genuine autonomous power. No matter how carefully they couched their arguments in Marxist terms, the Chinese continued to understand that power came from the barrel of a gun and to act accordingly. No matter how hard they tried to be Marxist economic determinists, Chinese on the left ended up as idealists of violence.

No one, not even Chen Duxiu, discarded completely the idea that the *junfa* had some independent power derived from arms and not economics. The problem for Chinese thinkers was not the intellectual status of violence but rather how to rid society of the pathology created when it was unleashed. Some argued that violence should be used against violence: Gao Yihan, as we have seen, was looking for the non-warlord general who would sweep the others away. Chen Duxiu envisioned a powerful party that would crush the warlords. This approach usually included a strong central force reforming China and pulling it together. Still others advocated a federal system of local government as the only solution. The Western argument about militarism, in other words, was transformed in its journey to China. This transformation may be seen clearly in Hu Shi's critiques of the usage of the new (and he thought inappropriate) word *junfa* by Chen Duxiu and Liang Shuming.

In 1922, Chen had elaborated his understanding of warlordism and its origins in an essay, "My Views on the Present Questions of Chinese Politics," which excited considerable controversy. Although Chen devoted plenty of ink to questions of economics and class, his ultimate analysis of violence would nevertheless have horrified Engels. Chen argued that "feudal countries are based on the power of *junfa*." A good Marxist would have known enough to say "based on feudal means of production." Likewise, Chen found the cure not in economic change or class struggle but in the creation of a strong and centralized party that could defeat the warlords and forge a strong and unified state. In this, he argued directly against the then-popular idea that the solution to China's problems would come from decentralization and provincial autonomy within a federal framework. That would only worsen things: for Chen, "the divisive activity of the militarists [was] the sole source of chaos in China."<sup>74</sup>

Hu Shi could not accept this analysis and replied to Chen on September 8, 1922.<sup>75</sup> He began with Chen's assertion that warlords were "the source of China's political disputes." Hu disagreed: Chen's *junfa* were "no more than a manifestation of the disorder, and by no means its origin." Where, Hu asked, did the "big and small *junfa*" come from? Chen had argued they were "left over from the imperial system." Hu compared this to saying that "rice originates in rice jars" and proposed instead an explanation of the *junfa* that stressed thought and politics and was clearly derived from Chinese tradition. The true source of warlordism,

<sup>74</sup> Chen Duxiu, "Duiyu xianzai Zhongguo zhengzhi wenti de wo jian," in *Hu Shi Zuopin Ji*, 9 (Taibei, 1986), 82–87, originally published in *Hu Shi Wencun* (Taibei, 1953), 2.3.

<sup>75</sup> Hu Shi, "Liansheng zizhi yu junfa geju—da Chen Duxiu," in *Hu Shi Zuopin Ji*, 9: 75–82.

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

But Chinese history demonstrated that, no matter how strong order imposed from above was initially, it eventually produced division or even disintegration. Real unity came only when the government relied on well-run, self-administering localities gradually to knit themselves and the country together. Such were the lessons of the rebellions of the late Qing. The forces that put down those disorders were not central army divisions but new armies that originated in local defense, such as the Xiang army. The new unity then achieved was the result of the self-defense of the various provinces. This pattern had continued into the twentieth century. For the last sixty years, the authority of the center had daily been shrinking, while local awareness had daily been increasing, and after 1911–1912 provincial autonomy had become a fact. Warlordism originated when, according to Hu, instead of understanding that the action of strong local institutions would eventually create a strong union, leaders attempted once again to use force to create unity. Hu concluded with a characteristically brilliant paradox: it was precisely such an attempt to impose unity militarily that created the divisions of warlordism. And, since attempting military unification had itself been the cause of *junfa* and division, a federal system of provincial autonomy should be a powerful weapon in today's struggle to remove the *junfa*.

Hu extended such analyses in an exchange with Liang Shuming in 1930. In his article "Which Road Are We Going?" written on April 13, 1930, Hu had listed "five enemies" of China, with "disorder" as the fifth. Conspicuously, he did not talk about warlordism, imperialism, or capitalism, although he did mention the dangers posed by self-proclaimed revolution and unbridled violence.<sup>76</sup> For this, Liang Shuming (1893–1988) took him to task, maintaining in the second issue of his journal *Cunzhi* that "warlordism" was the true source of China's ills. Hu, in his response of July 1930, continued to insist that the origin of warlordism lay in the failure of civil society, not in imperialism. Poverty and internal strife in China long antedated imperialism. The real problem was disorder: "Warlords are a product of disorder."<sup>77</sup>

Hu Shih did not agree with either side in the Western argument about militarism. He did not blame soldiers for it, nor did he blame capitalism and imperialism. Finding the new term *junfa* inappropriate, he propounded a genuinely "Chinese" approach—one that took civil order as both primary and autonomous. Like Zhang Junmai, he saw military authority as fundamentally weak when compared to the civilian and, furthermore, blamed the lack of strong civil government in China not on ambitious soldiers but on degraded intellectuals. Traditionally the moral arbiters of society, China's intellectuals had become

<sup>76</sup> In *Hu Shi Wencun*, 4th ser. (Taibei, 1953), 429–44; also translated in abbreviated form in Hu Shih and Lin Yu-t'ang, eds., *China's Own Critics* (1931; rpt. edn., New York, 1969), 11–21.

<sup>77</sup> Liang Shuming, "Jing yi qingjiao Hushizhi xiānshèng," in *Cunzhi*, 1 (1930): 1–8; also in Liang, *Zhongguo minzu ziju yundong zhi zuihou juewu* (Shanghai, 1936), 381–91.

dependent and opportunistic (*zougouhua*, literally, “running-dog-ified”). Hu then turned the entire argument around:

My Teacher [Liang] says, “disorder is all the result of activities of the warlords,” but this is not in accordance with historical fact. Warlords are the product of disorder, and disorder is by and large created by our friends in long gowns [intellectuals]. Of all the so-called revolutions of the last twenty years, which one was not created by intellectuals [*wenren*]? Of the warlord struggles of the last twenty years, which one was not stimulated by disappointed political opportunists [*zhengke*]? Of the local violence of the Communist party [The year 1927 had seen an unprecedented campaign of terrorism], which case has not been fanned and organized by the comrades in long gowns? These three categories account for 70 or 80 percent of chaos.

Disorder and warlordism, to Hu Shi, were neither the products of the social contradictions of capitalism, as Liebknecht would have argued, nor of the men in gold braid, as Angell would have. Returning to the Chinese understanding that, at least in their polity, *wen* (civil) will dominate *wu* (military), Hu argued that they were ultimately the product of civilian politics.<sup>78</sup>

Something very interesting has happened here. Neither Chen nor Hu argued a Western point of view. Their argument may seem on the surface to be about militarism, a Western concern. But, at a deeper level, it is about two abiding concerns of Chinese political thought: the moral responsibility of the individual and the question of central versus local government. Chen stressed the role of a single individual as a centralizer and was thus, in effect, an advocate of the *junxian* approach to organizing China; Hu drew on the decentralizing ideas represented by the *fengjian* tradition.<sup>79</sup> The central economic and historical concerns of the Western argument were missing from the Chinese debate.

AFTER CHIANG KAI-SHEK's at least partially successful unification of China, the environment and the debate shifted yet again, in ways that began to leave the “warlord” behind. True, the 1930s were the most favorable years for Chinese cartoon publications, with nearly twenty being published in the Shanghai area, and they saw the left produce much polemic and many images making use of “warlord” themes and iconography.<sup>80</sup> But, for the idea of the “warlord” proper, this was a period of transition. With the initiation of the United Front against the Japanese in 1936, many of the “old” warlords became deeply involved in national defense efforts, while Chiang Kai-shek became the unquestioned national leader whom no one, not even the Communists, was willing to denounce as a “new warlord.” Attack shifted to the Japanese “militarists” and their collaborators. Japanese leaders and soldiers were portrayed much as “warlords” had been earlier, as in the work of Zhang E (1910– ), a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> “Da Liang Shuming xiasheng” (19–7–29, i.e. July 29, 1930), in *Hu Shi Luncun*, 4th ser. (Taibei, 1953), 444–46.

<sup>79</sup> For these concepts, see Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.*, F. W. Mote, trans. (Princeton, N.J., 1979).

<sup>80</sup> See table in Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, 125–30, plates 171, 173.

But the figures of the 1930s were not "warlords" as we have been treating them. Indeed, the term was acquiring a certain archaic, even affectionate, flavor by the late 1920s, when Winston Churchill was sometimes called a "War Lord."<sup>82</sup> The concept was inadequate to deal with Fascists and Nazis. In response, the linguistic and visual vocabulary grew. Boris Efimov's caricatures of Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Hitler transcended the "warlord" genre and pushed into the territory of generalized militaristic social evil, creating in the process a highly influential set of new images.<sup>83</sup>

In the meantime, students of China, both in Japan and the West, were beginning to rework their understandings of the 1920s to produce what is, in essence, the accepted approach today. Strict sinology, concerned with etymology, translation, and narrative, was on the decline. In its place came the sociological approach, which found the idea of "warlordism" congenial. It became, for the first time, an object of study and scholarly inquiry. Many Japanese used the term, and this eventually spawned a vast literature (although other Japanese retained the earlier vocabulary: Naitō Konan, for example, writing in 1924 about contemporary China, still spoke of *dujun* politics [*tokugun seiji*] and not *junfa*).<sup>84</sup> In the West, the word "warlord"—now translated back from the Chinese *junfa*—caught on quickly.

Edgar Snow first heard of "warlords" during his initial trip out East in 1928. He recalled how a young Chinese student he met aboard ship had announced "'China is on the road at last!' . . . 'Domination by the warlords is ended,' he assured me. I had only a vague notion of what a warlord was then but I was ready to assume that it was beneficial for China that they had been scuppered."<sup>85</sup> Harley Farnsworth MacNair, lecturing at the University of Chicago in the spring of 1930, named one session "The War Lords, 1916–1928."<sup>86</sup> The Westerners, like the Chinese, proved unable to decide whether "warlordism" was something new or a feature of Chinese society since time immemorial. R. H. Tawney drew a parallel between Chinese society and the history of Europe: "To suppose that China is unique in her political disorders is an illusion. They are the characteristic, not of a country, but of a phase of civilisation, from which other societies have painfully emerged, but from which . . . China is only now emerging."<sup>87</sup> Fei Xiaotong is one of many Chinese who were probably influenced by such accounts and who used their general frameworks as models for their own theorizing about social structure in China.<sup>88</sup> But while Tawney and Fei would make "warlordism" a feature of one stage, eventually passed, in social evolution, historian John Fairbank saw it as one of the "repetitive phenomena" of a "distinctive and

<sup>82</sup> For example, "Winston Churchill—A British War Lord," *Current History*, January 1929.

<sup>83</sup> See N. Vladimirovskii, ed., *Za prochnyi mir, protiv podzhigatelei voiny: Risunki B. Efimova* (Moscow, 1950), for many examples.

<sup>84</sup> Naitō Konan, *Naitō Konan zenshū*, Kanda Kiichiro and Naitō Kenkichi, eds., 14 vols. (Tokyo, 1966–74), 5: 523.

<sup>85</sup> Edgar Snow, *Far Eastern Front* (New York, 1933), 155.

<sup>86</sup> Later published in Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *China in Revolution: An Analysis of Politics and Militarism under the Republic* (Chicago, 1931). See also Kurt Bloch, "Warlordism: A Transitory Stage in Chinese Government," *American Journal of Sociology*, 43 (March 1938): 691–703.

<sup>87</sup> R. H. Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*, Barrington Moore, Jr., intro. (1932; rpt. edn., White Plains, N.Y., 1966), 167–68.

<sup>88</sup> See the "Introduction" by Robert Redfield to *China's Gentry: Essays in Rural-Urban Relations by Hsiao-Tung Fei*, rev. and ed. by Margaret Park Redfield, (Chicago, 1953), 15.

“persistent Chinese pattern” characterized by repeated cycles of “dynastic disintegration, warlordism, and re-unification.”<sup>89</sup>

Along with such attempts to deal with “warlordism” as a phenomenon, there emerged among Westerners in the 1930s and 1940s a new popular account of “warlords,” which in its own way was as preposterous as the earlier accounts of *tuchiüns*. Americans who spent time in Chongqing seem to have shared a common picture, presented here by Theodore White. “As the old system of government withered away, the war lords assumed complete sway over the lives of the peasants and fought among themselves wars that were as comic and barbarous as any ever recorded. The war lords were colorful figures; they lived joyfully with many concubines in great mansions, waxed fat on the opium trade, extorted taxes from the peasantry fifty years in advance, wrung land from the original owners to add to their own estates. In the process they became great manorial barons, full of wealth and pride.”<sup>90</sup> “Warlords” had ceased to be modern or even new; they were a colorful if evil archaism.

For hard denunciation, we can look to the new anti-fascist vocabulary, or to anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism. In the early 1940s, Edgar Snow saw Mao Zedong sympathetically as a “Red Warlord,” while he found Chiang Kai-shek repugnantly “nazified.”<sup>91</sup> Just how diminished the old category of “warlord” had become by the end of World War II can be seen in both Soviet and Chinese portrayals of Chiang in the late 1940s and after. No longer a threatening figure, he is a little tailor embroidering a Guomindang star on an American flag or a Lilliputian Chinaman with buckteeth, clinging to the nose of the American secretary of state John Foster Dulles (Figures 10–11).<sup>92</sup>

With the end of an active civil war in the 1950s, “warlord” ceased to be a living term in Chinese. It was an important word in orthodox Communist historiography and figured regularly in formulaic political denunciations, as in the *People's Daily* on Peng Dehuai (1898–1974): “[A] totally capitalist great warlord.”<sup>93</sup> But it seemed unlikely ever again to become a “keyword” in either politics or scholarly debate. That verdict, however, came into question after the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989. Once more, the role of the military became the key question in Chinese politics, and as that happened, the polemics and the analytical questions of the 1920s gradually regained prominence.

This was certainly clear in rhetoric. In June 1989, demonstrators outside Chinese missions abroad cried, “Down with the Yang family warlords!” [“Yangjia junfa!”]<sup>94</sup> Others shouted, “Down with the fascist new warlords!” In Paris, the

<sup>89</sup> John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports 1842–1854* (1953, 1964; rpt. edn., Stanford, Calif., 1969), 7. I have rearranged the order of phrases here but have not, I trust, distorted Professor Fairbank's meaning.

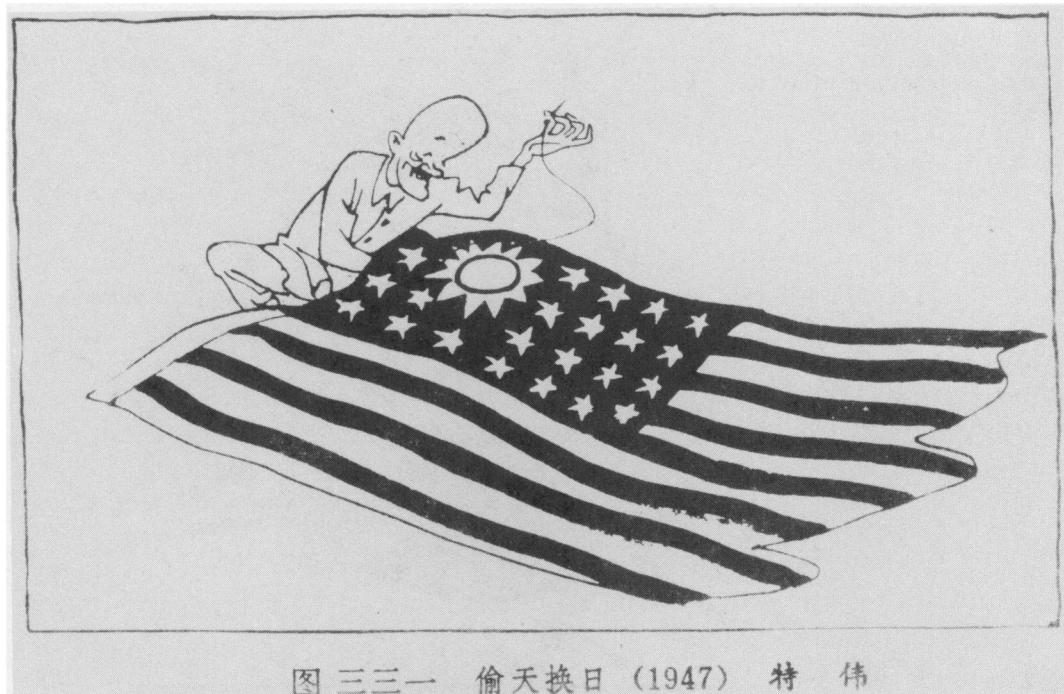
<sup>90</sup> Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder out of China* (New York, 1946), 4.

<sup>91</sup> Edgar Snow, *People on Our Side* (New York, 1944), 207, 209.

<sup>92</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhuashi*, plate 331; *Satira na vragov mira: Risunki khudozhnika M. Abramova stikhi poeta Sergeja Mikhailova* ([USSR], 1957).

<sup>93</sup> August 16, 1967, quoted in Jurgen Domes, *Peng Te-huai: The Man and the Image* (London, 1985), 121.

<sup>94</sup> Yang Shangkun b. 1907, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission; Yang Baibing, political commissar of the Beijing military region; and Chi Haotian, political commissar of the Jinan military region, all believed to be relatives by blood or marriage.



图三三一 偷天换日 (1947) 特伟

FIGURE 10: The warlord diminished. Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1940s. Bi and Huang, plate 331.

student leader Wuer Kaixi "called the Communist Government 'a pack of reactionary warlords and fascists' while predicting its demise in six months to three years."<sup>95</sup> The return to old themes was also increasingly evident in political argument. Questions once asked only about the "warlords" of the 1920s are now being asked about the present as well. Lucian Pye has argued that "warlords established the fact that in modern China political power cannot be divorced from military power." This is certainly true. But it is also true that, as James Sheridan has responded, "the failure of the warlords demonstrated that military power alone is an inadequate basis for political power in China."<sup>96</sup> If the "fascist new warlords" lack an adequate basis for power, what then will replace them? Some hope, as Gao Yihan and Wu Zihui did, that military means will somehow solve the problem: a good army or a good general will appear. (Recall the hopes that one or another of the Chinese armies would intervene to stop the repression in June 1989.) But it is striking that others reject violence altogether, and the leading intellectual Yan Jiaqi, now in exile, is calling for "federal solutions" to China's problems, just as Hu Shi and the liberals did in the 1920s.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Author's personal information; *New York Times* (June 30, 1989): A6.

<sup>96</sup> Lucian W. Pye, *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China* (New York, 1971), 41, quoted in James E. Sheridan, "The Warlord Era: Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916–28," in *Republican China 1912–1949, Part I*, John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 12 (Cambridge, 1983), 319.

<sup>97</sup> Yan Jiaqi, "Zhongguo bing bu shi 'gongheguo,'" *Huaqiao erbao* (New York), (July 24, 1989): 8, and (July 25, 1989): 8, originally published in *Ming bao* (Hong Kong) (July 23 and 24, 1989); see also his remarks, "Weilai Zhongguo sibuqu," in First Congress of Chinese Students and Scholars in the U.S.A., *Conference News* (Chicago), no. 3 (July 29, 1989): 7. For a summary, see Arthur Waldron, "Warlordism versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?" *China Quarterly*, 121 (March 1990): 116–28.

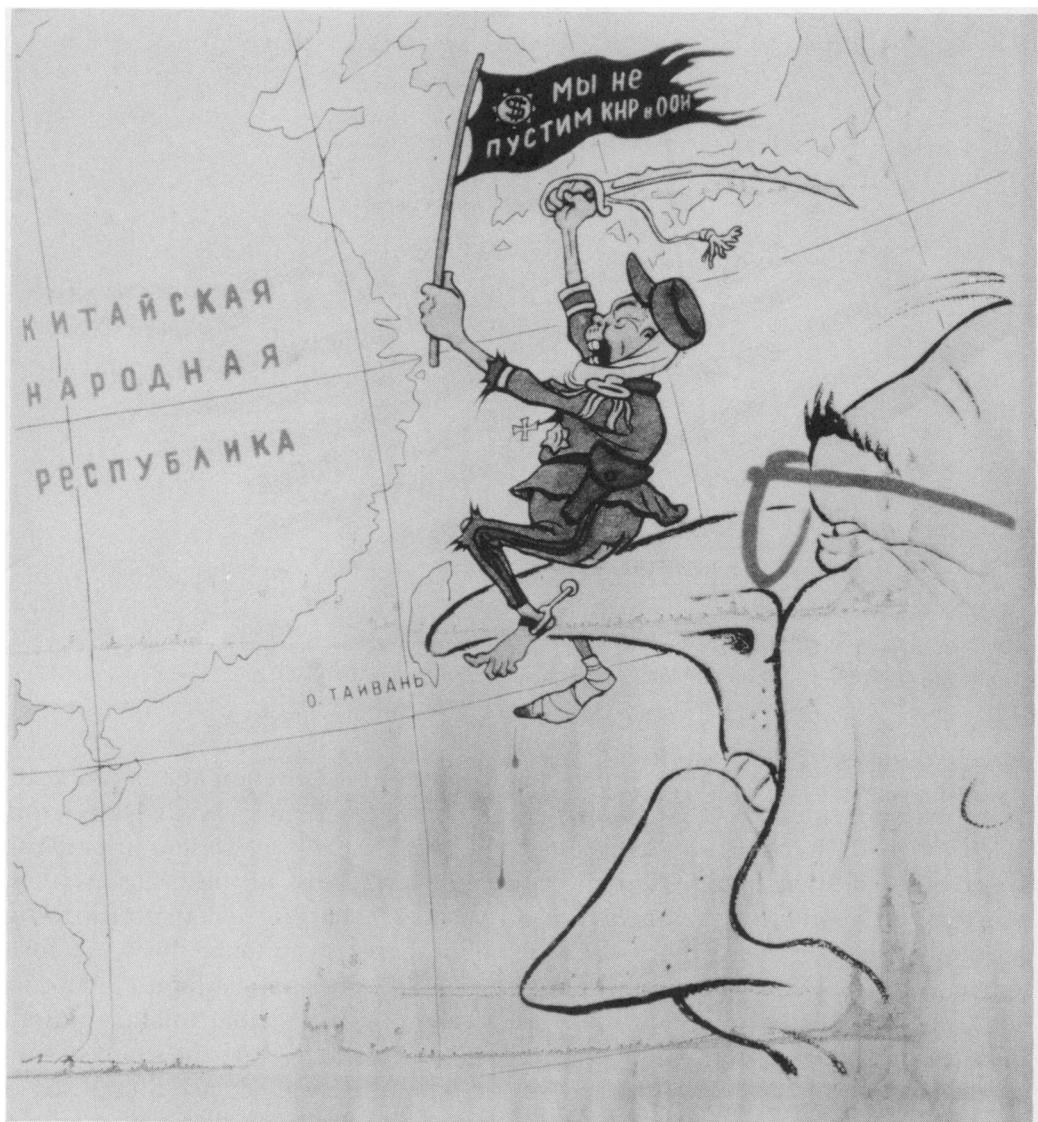


FIGURE 11: M. Abramov, "Predstavite' i ego Pokrovitel'" (Representative and Patron). The cartoon shows Chiang Kai-shek perched on the end of the nose of John Foster Dulles. The caption states: "Giving support to Taiwan puppets USA in every way obstructs the entry into U.N. of 600 million Chinese people." *Satira na vragov mira. Risunki khudozhinika M. Abramova stikhi poeta Sergieia Mikhailova* ([USSR], 1957).

A sixty-year cycle has been completed in China since the end of the Northern Expedition, and political debate in China seems to have returned to where it was then: to basic issues of the nature of civil society, the status of force, and how to break once and for all the patterns of internal political violence that led to the creation of the vocabulary of the *junfa* in the first place.