Comprehensive Guide to the Chinese Warlord Era

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese Warlord period, from 1916 to 1928, was a time of intense political fragmentation and military government following the collapse of the Beiyang government, which succeeded the better-known Republic of China established by Sun Yat-Sen after the Chinese Revolution. This period is often overlooked in the West as an interim between the Chinese Revolution and the Second Sino-Japanese War, yet it is more than that, and its role in Chinese history is pivotal. Throughout these twelve years, China was fractured into multiple military governments led by warlords. These warlords would group and form cliques or alliances that often merged warlord territory. As a result of the collapse of the constitutional government that Sun Yat-Sen and Yuan Shikai (a former Qing statesman) agreed to, multiple militarymen who held great political office in the young republic filled the power void, making China greatly disunified. This led to casualties totaling the hundreds of thousands, which consisted of both civilian and military deaths. This paper analyzes secondary sources such as academic papers. This paper narrows down the warlord period into three distinct cliques: the Anhui, the Zhili, and the Fengtian. By doing so, it simplifies the period while highlighting its historical significance. The warlord period was pivotal for China's fate: it not only weakened the country, which made it more susceptible to Japanese invasion, but also led to the rise of the Kuomintang, which, in turn, facilitated the communist takeover. This research is important because these events are overlooked, and by providing a general overview of the period, readers could gain a better understanding of this pivotal time in Chinese history.

Introduction:

When taught about 20th-century China, American students often learn about the fall of the Qing dynasty, the rise of the nationalists, the Japanese invasion, and the ultimate rise of the communists. For example, when I took my AP World History class, only the "big three" powers - the Kuomintang, the Communists, and Japanese Manchukuo - were mentioned. The Warlord Era, from 1916 to 1928, is often underrecognized in mainstream education. Mainstream history depicts the fall of the Beiyang government as the starting point of the nationalists and communists' takeover. Still, the government's fall was followed by warlords seizing control of multiple provinces. Although the Chinese Warlord Era was highly influential in shaping modern China, the Western world, including the United States, knows very little about it. The rise of both the Communists and the Nationalists is attributed to warlords, who have shaped the divide between Taiwan and China today. The Warlord Era is probably the best example of how history can repeat itself: the Warlord Era is similar to both the Warring States period following the fall of the Zhou Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period following the fall of the Han Dynasty; the Warlord Era is different in that, following the era, a new dynasty did not emerge. Although China still bears the lasting legacy of the warlord era, much of the rest of the world remains unaware of it. How should mainstream history depict the Warlord Era? An era that marked the transition from a newly formed republic to authoritarian communism? A twelve-year constant conflict, killing thousands of people a day? The Chinese Warlord Era (1916-1928) marked a tumultuous period of Chinese succession. Still, its decentralization through local autonomy and power

struggles would ultimately set the stage for the rise of the Nationalist and Communist movements, which unified China into what it is today.

This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive guide to the main Chinese Warlords, one by one. This guide will break down each clique or band of warlords to further clarify their importance in shaping China. Other research papers on the Chinese warlord era alternate between warlords and chronology. This research paper will focus on the Fengtian Clique, the Zhili Clique, and the Anhui Clique, as well as their conflicts, which contributed to the rise of the Kuomintang during their northern expedition.

The Chinese Warlord era followed the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916. Following the 1911 revolution that overthrew the Qing dynasty, revolutionaries sought to establish a new republic to replace the old dynastic system. On January 1, 1912, Sun Yat Sen was inaugurated as the provisional president of the Republic of China. Sun's presidency would only last 2 months until he struck a deal with Yuan: Yuan would become president, preserving republicanism in China. Additionally, Yuan would help the Qing emperor abdicate. As a former Qing general and prime minister, he established a modernized army known as the New Army and maintained connections with Qing officials. Yuan would fill government positions with loyalists and eventually declare himself the emperor of China. He would give provinces to multiple generals, further decentralizing the Beiyang government. This act would turn many prominent Beiyang generals into Warlords. Yuan's Beiyang government ultimately crumbled once Yuan declared himself emperor, since even his loyalists began to dislike him. Yuan would abdicate in March 1916 and pass away the following June. This would further destabilize the Beiyang government, leading to the Chinese warlord era.

Why Warlordism in China? Dr. Roberts claims that the traces of warlordism began even before the Xinhai Revolution of 1911.[3] As mentioned earlier, Yuan Shikai was a general in the Qing dynasty. In the 1890s, Yuan Shikai established the New Army, also known as the Beiyang Army, China's first modern military force. During Yuan's presidency and reign, he would distribute multiple provinces to his generals. Upon his death, those same generals would scramble for control of the land, leading to the rise of the warlord era. Yuan is often regarded as the "father of the warlords," but Dr. Roberts, along with Stephen MacKinnon, refutes this idea. Dr. Roberts states, “The Beiyang army was less regional and private than the regional armies of the mid-nineteenth century, and the personal connections between Yuan and his senior officers were not as strong as has been suggested… Yuan does not fit the basic definition of a warlord.”[3]

Dr. Roberts states that over 160 wars were fought within 12 years. A common misconception of the warlord era is that the Beiyang Republic of China fell after Yuan's death. Dr. Roberts states, “The Beiyang army was less regional and private than the regional armies of the mid-nineteenth century, and the personal connections between Yuan and his senior officers were not as strong as has been suggested… Yuan does not fit the basic definition of a warlord.”[3] Although the Beiyang government was severely weakened, it was still a "government" only in name. During the warlord era, warlords would fight over Beijing, claiming that their clique was the legitimate China. The warlords would compete for legitimacy to gain foreign support.

Multiple warlords would be organized into groups or states known as cliques. Since multiple warlords ruled cliques, many cliques had a prominent leader. For example, the Fengtian Clique's leader was Zhang Zuo-Lin, who ruled Manchuria; however, there were other warlords within the clique, such as Zhang Zong-Chang, who ruled Shandong.

The Chinese warlord era is often underappreciated for its significant impact on modern-day China. By understanding the warlord cliques, we can infer the ultimate rise of the nationalists as well as the rise of the Communists. As mentioned earlier, this paper will be simplified by dividing each warlord into their respective cliques and factions. Among the many cliques discussed will be the Fengtian Clique, the Zhili Clique, and the Anhui Clique.

Historiography

Intro to Historiography:

The historiography section of the research paper examines the varying viewpoints on this historical topic throughout time. By reviewing other views, research on this particular period can enhance existing views. This section of the paper will explore views of the period as it was unfolding, perspectives from the 1960s and 1970s, and contemporary viewpoints. This paper, although aimed at being descriptive and analytical, adopts a relatively neutral stance, drawing on viewpoints from the historians discussed in this section.

Contemporary Accounts during the Warlord Period

Among the sources reviewed were Chinese accounts from newspapers, as well as Western accounts by historians Quincy Wright and H.B. Morse. The accounts by the West depicted the Warlord era solely as a period of rivaling factions brought on by the instability of the Qing. They represent China similarly to how British historians depicted the Ottoman Empire: a hot mess of nationalism. It is essential to remember that, since these are Western accounts, they tend to favor Western views, which often include a preference for warlords more amenable to Western interests, and have a limited understanding of events unfolding in China. The Chinese newspapers, which include Min Kuo Jih Pao by Chen Qimei, a local warlord friendly to Chiang and Sun in the 20s, are also biased in that they support a certain faction and only focus

on urban accounts, which means that not everything they say can be applied to the entirety of China. These newspapers are helpful in that they provide a Chinese perspective and inform us about events, yet they fail to put the period into a broader context, focusing instead on a single region.

Western accounts include Wright and Morse. Quincy Wright was an American political scientist who studied international politics as a whole. Among Wright's works are *A Study of War* and *A Study of International Relations*. Wright's work, *Wu Peifu*, was published in 1926 and is a study of the man himself as well as the Zhili clique. This Western account is essential in that it assesses Wu Peifu's actions during the internal struggle among cliques and how he serves as a stabilizing force, contributing to the balance of power in China. Morse was a historian and a British customs officer. He wrote *"International Relations in China"* in 1908, which provides a valuable early account of the instability preceding the 1911 revolution. In 1927, he wrote *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origin of Modern China,* which views the warlord era as an international relations problem, caused by tensions in the West and as a result of existing tensions during the Qing dynasty. It is due to these two historians that we have a detailed account of the warlord era. Their works focus on the militaristic aspects of the warlord era, but also contribute to the instability resulting from international relations issues. While much of the West continued to view China as barbaric and uncivilized, Morse stated that the cliques were not bandit groups, but rather groups seeking legitimacy to become the successor of the Qing dynasty.

This paper uses a few contemporary accounts from the warlord period and accounts of those who had lived through the period and written about it later on. During this time, newspapers like the Min Kuo Jih Pao flourished in major cities. A trend among these newspapers includes

favoritism towards republican ideals, which often supported the Kuomintang. It was because of newspapers like these that strengthened the Kuomintang, since people in urban areas increasingly saw the warlords as barbaric, as opposed to the pure form that the Chinese republic sought to take in 1911. While these contemporary sources are not widely used in this paper, they have helped influence studies of post-war China, which this paper does utilize.

Perspectives during the 60s and 70s

Studies in the 1960s and 1970s are a reflection of the period, which makes them distinct from the contemporary accounts that occurred during the warlord period. A trend in these works is that rather than focusing on the military and barbarity of the period, they describe structural interpretations. This allowed for interpretations used in the modern period. This paper drew the most inspiration from these works. These sources are also from historians and are not from the press or reports from Western governments.

The authors in these perspectives include Donald Gillan, Jerome Ch'en, and Hsi-hseng Chi. Donald Gillan's 1967 work *Review: Warlordism in Modern China* acts as a framework for studies in the modern era. Similar to Morse and different from Wright, Gillan believed that warlordism arose not from internal factors, but rather from social and economic factors. By publishing this work, Gillan influenced groups of historians to explore the international aspects of the warlord period as opposed to the barbaric aspect that Western media portrayed in the Fengtian Clique. Jerome Ch'en's work, *"Defining Chinese Warlords and Their Factions,"* is among the most influential for this paper in that it focuses on the origins and fall of each clique, including many of the wars.[2] Hsi-hseng Chi's work, *The Chinese Warlord System: 1916 to 1928,* focuses on internal hierarchy and organization within each clique. Something fascinating in Chi's work is that it explores how cliques interacted with the Beiyang government.[1] It cannot be

overstated that these authors laid the groundwork for modern studies of the Chinese warlord era, providing a descriptive insight into the origins, organization, hierarchy, and fall of each clique.

Viewpoints in the Modern Era (1980s to Present)

As stated earlier, the works of the 1960s and 1970s have influenced the modern era. A general trend in these works is that there are many different interpretations and focuses on the warlord period, as opposed to the previous two eras. Many sources focus on the loss of life rather than the cliques themselves. Many of these authors are still from the West, but there is a rise in works from China. In short, these sources focus on the people and aid this research paper in terms of social problems in the period.

Among the authors cited in this paper are Diana Lary, Edward McCord, and Huang Zhangkai. Lary is an esteemed professor at the University of British Columbia. Her 1985 work, *Warlord Studies,* focuses on the loss of human life during the warlord period, as experienced by multiple sides.[6] This paper uses Dr. Lary's work to reference those events. This differs from works of the previous two eras from the perspective of focusing on the big-picture rise and fall of cliques, instead of going in-depth about the ordinary citizen and how the period affected them. McCord's 1996 work, *Warlords Against Warlordism,* brings the perspective on internal resistance to warlords to return to republicanism that was promised in 1911. Finally, Huang Zhangkai's work, published in 2021, utilizes statistics that directly tie the warlord period to the rise of the communists, thereby helping to evaluate economic factors. This work was essential to this study because it helps connect this period to the revolution with which many people are familiar.

Connection to this Paper

Rather than the views offered by modern accounts, this paper draws much of its inspiration from papers in the 60s and 70s. This paper argues that the warlord period is significant because it laid the groundwork for the communist revolution. It does not refute arguments made by Lary or McCord, but builds on the perspectives of Ch'en and Gillan. It is because of the dominance of the three cliques discussed that not only contributed to over 200 wars, but also to a massive overhaul in Chinese society.

The Rise of the Warlords (1895-1916):

Early Analysis of the Warlord Era, Analysis of the Yuan, Early Rise of Warlords

The rise of warlords follows a historical trend in Chinese history: A dynasty will lose its "mandate of heaven," thus losing its legitimacy, and its fall will result in a period of fragmentation until a new dynasty can restore order. An old Chinese proverb describes this fragmentation: "The land under Heaven will disintegrate after long periods of integration and will reintegrate after long periods of disintegration".[1] This political fragmentation occurred during the fall of the Zhou Dynasty during the Warring States Period, the fall of the Qin Dynasty following a swift struggle for succession, the fall of the Han Dynasty during the Three Kingdoms Period, and finally, the fall of the Qing Dynasty during the Warlord Era from 1916 to 1928.

What was different about the Warlord Era from 1916 to 1928 compared to other Warlord Eras, such as the Warring States Period or the Three Kingdoms Period? Dr. Chen puts it this way: "Whereas medieval barons existed before the advent of nationalism, Chinese warlordism was born a twin of Chinese nationalism whose life story was complicated by the coexistence of modern ideological currents in post-revolution".[2] The key ingredient in this destructive era of Chinese history is nationalism. During the Warring States period or any Warlord Era preceding

the advent of nationalism, armies were primarily motivated by loyalty to local lords rather than the concept of a unified China under a national identity or ideology. It is argued that nationalism played a substantial role in the Warlord Era because, given the weakness of the Beiyang government, it prompted military leaders to create a stronger and better China. This suggests that the Beiyang government likely fragmented immediately after Yuan's death due to the nationalistic efforts aimed at establishing a more assertive China.

The roots of the Warlord Era are not found in the fall of the Qing Dynasty but rather in the emergence of the New Army and Yuan's Beiyang government. What was the modern army? In 1895, following the Qing Dynasty's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the Qing Dynasty established the New Army.[1] The New Army was trained by German advisors, making it the first truly modern army in China that could even rival the armies of the West. After the Boxer War of 1900, only the "Right Division of the Guard Army" under Yuan Shikai survived.[2] Yuan was a military general who later became the prime minister of the Qing Dynasty in China. The warlords would have become militarily significant regardless of whether the 1911 revolution had occurred or not. The absence of a strong central authority, such as the Yuan, would lead these military officials to become warlords, explaining why the Beiyang government ultimately fragmented after the Yuan's demise. Dr. Chen explains that the 1911 revolution did not create the warlords but rather facilitated their growth from military officers to warlords.[2]

Nevertheless, Yuan began to give out multiple provinces to his most prized military officers.[4] Dividing these provinces would further decentralize the Beiyang government, and since these generals already commanded legions of soldiers, they quickly emerged as warlords after the fall of the Beiyang. Ultimately, the militaristic rise of the warlords is attributed to the rapid militarization of late Qing dynasty China under Yuan, the rise of the Beiyang government

as military officers, and the death of Yuan, which left the Beiyang government without a central authority, leading to instability.

Yuan is often regarded as the "father of the warlords." Although his actions, such as heading the New Army and taking control of the Beiyang government, were brash and contributed to the warlord era, Dr. Roberts argues that the Beiyang army wasn't as central as we might think and that Yuan did not form tight connections with these generals.[3] Both of these claims are false. Both of these claims suggest that the Yuan simply allowed a decentralized government to exist. Yuan, who declared himself Emperor of China in 1916, would not tolerate a decentralized government. After all, he was a dictator and mad with power. Decentralization was a key component of the Warlord Era, but Yuan would use his best efforts to centralize China under his own rule. Although the Beiyang army wasn't as centralized as we might think, it was certainly autonomous. Yuan used his army to crush multiple republican revolts in the south and monarchist movements in the north. For example, in 1913, the "Second Revolution" was headed by the Kuomintang government, the nationalist government headed by Sun Yat-sen in the south, which rallied the Southern states against Yuan's Beiyang Government and demanded that Yuan resign as president.[1] Yuan sent his Beiyang army and successfully crushed the southern forces.[1] The failure of the "second revolution" led to the expulsion of most revolutionaries in the Beiyang army and even helped drive out Kuomintang forces from the south for a time. By suppressing the "second revolution," Yuan not only demonstrated that the Beiyang army was central and autonomous but also showcased the centralization and power of the Beiyang government in its efforts to suppress revolutionaries and monarchists. Due to Yuan's negligence, despite having a central government and army, he is held responsible as the "father of the warlords."

Rise of Warlordism after Yuan's death, Rise of the "Big Three" Warlords

Yuan's death in 1916 ultimately left China unstable and decentralized.[7] Yuan's ultimate dictatorship ended after he tried to establish himself as emperor.[7] Although he abdicated and stepped back from politics, the young Chinese republic entered a small succession crisis or even a power vacuum. Since Yuan's government was primarily militaristic, the top generals of the Beiyang army would likely succeed him as prime minister and president of China. It could be argued that the rise of military leaders contributed to the emergence of the Warlord Era we observe.

Following Yuan's abdication and death, Li Yuanhong succeeded him as president of the Republic of China. Given that Yuan essentially transformed the republic into a military dictatorship, Li, as well as many other high-ranking officials, were generals or military officers. Yuan's death disrupted the military hierarchy, which ultimately meant that these army officers took orders from no one, especially not the weak and incompetent Li.[1] Yuan gave many of his top-ranking officials provinces, meaning that many of these warlords started their careers with provinces.[1]

Wu Peifu, leader of the Northern ZhiLi Clique, demonstrates the lack of loyalty that many warlords exhibit, thus highlighting the absence of a centralized government. Wu Peifu was known for his Confucian ideals and opposition to Western ideas that Sun Yat-Sen preached.[2] Confucianism emphasizes hierarchical relationships, such as those between father and son, husband and wife, and, most importantly, between the emperor and his subjects. Wu Peifu argued that since the republic no longer had an emperor, the Chinese no longer had to stay loyal to the new Chinese Republic. For example, Wu stated, "In the republican period, we should not talk about being loyal to the emperor because we no longer have one".[2] He

interpreted the emperor-subject relationship as being between the emperor alone, rather than a president like Sun or a military dictator like Yuan. Although Wu was not loyal to the republic, he pledged allegiance to other warlords. When the Fengtian clique defeated the ZhiLi clique, he continued to fight under the vassalage of his superior, Cao Kun, or the leader of the ZhiLi Clique as a whole.[2] Wu's loyalty, like that of many other warlords, demonstrates loyalty to a specific clique rather than to China as a whole. Mixing this with nationalism led to the destructive Warlord Era we know today.

Foreign Powers

It is important to note that foreign powers still retained influence in China. The Japanese seized the region of Qingdao during World War I, and the Treaty of Versailles granted Japan the region of Shandong, prompting the May Fourth Movement, which demonstrated the rise of Nationalism in China. This territory would give Japan a foothold in China, which would prove vital in its invasion in the 1930s. Additionally, Japan would collaborate with the Fengtian Clique until the Mukden incident of 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria, establishing a puppet government known as Manchukuo. It should be stressed that Western powers still retained their spheres of influence in China; however, the Warlord Era, the rise of nationalism, and decolonization helped diminish them. Britain continued to hold Hong Kong until 1997, and France still had territory in Guangzhou. Still, the warlords also collaborated with foreign powers. The most popular example, although many do not consider him a warlord, is when Chiang collaborated with the United States to fight off the Japanese.

Aftermath of Yuan's death: Rise of Duan Qirui; the Rise of Zhili leaders: Feng and Cao

Duan Qirui succeeded Yuan as the Prime Minister of the Republic of China.[1] Duan, of course, was the minister of war and was part of Yuan's cabinet.[5] Although he was part of Yuan's cabinet, he strongly opposed Yuan when he proclaimed himself emperor. Duan was as corrupt as Yuan; Duan dissolved the parliament, an action that was strongly opposed by the Kuomintang and the Republican Army.[1]

Like Yuan, Duan's government was excessively militaristic, prompting provinces around him to proclaim sovereignty either through a military leader, a warlord, or a rebellion. Dr. Chen emphasizes that in the warlord era, there were differences between military and civil power.[2] With civilian supremacy, there were no warlords. Regions like Hunan had civilian superiority, but all these states would be invaded by states with warlords, as a state under warlords would naturally be more militaristic than states with civilian supremacy.

Since Duan was the Prime Minister, he believed it was within his authority to appoint officials. Duan would appoint a military governor to Hunan, but this appointee, although a native of Hunan, sympathized more with the north since he had been raised there.[1] In response, the Hunanese governor secretly deployed his troops to oppose this.[1] Following the outbreak of war, Hunanese warlords declared independence and opposed both sides. The civilian population stirred in contempt against Duan, giving rise to a federalist movement in Hunan.[6] Peace was eventually negotiated, but Hunan was still fractured into warlords, and the Republic of China was also experiencing instability. His military generals of the 8th and 20th divisions, Cao Kun and Feng Guozhang, did not lead a coup but did want the Hunanese governorship for themselves and deemed the Hunan invasions unethical.[1] This demonstrates the further

fracturing of the Republic of China, as Feng would go on to found the Zhili Clique, and Cao would succeed Feng as its leader.[2]

The South during and after the decentralization of the Beiyang Government

As warlords were consolidating power in the North, Southern China was in chaos.[1] The southern provinces of the centralized Beiyang government played an active role in politics, particularly in opposition to the Yuan's policies.[1] The Kuomintang, the government established by former President Sun Yat-Sen in the south, rebelled during the Second Revolution in 1913 but was soon suppressed within a few months.[1] Following Yuan's death, military leaders in the south, Tang Jiyao from Yunnan and Lu Rongting from Guangxi, declared themselves sovereign from the Beiyang government.[7] Southern warlords like Tang and Lu allowed Sun to establish a parliament and a military government in 1919; however, this would not be as effective, as the same warlords would ultimately drive him out of the southern regions. In 1924, Sun established the Kuomintang, also known as the New Republic of China, as a military government with the opening of the Whampoa Military Academy in Guangzhou.[8] Sun's death in 1925 led Chiang Kai-shek, an army officer, to assume the role of Generalissimo of the Kuomintang.[8] Chiang would invade the rest of the southern Chinese warlords and eventually launch multiple northern expeditions, which were completed by 1928. Ultimately, these expeditions would defeat the warlords but leave two perceived threats: the communists and the Japanese.[8]

The simplified rise of the Anhui, Zhili, and Fengtian Cliques

It is often very complicated to trace the origin of each Warlord Clique; to simplify this further, I have condensed each origin into a single paragraph. Of course, each of these is

simplified, but in the upcoming sections of the paper, I will dive deeper into how exactly these cliques formed.

Anhui Clique: The Anhui Clique was founded by Duan Qirui in 1917. According to Dr. Chen, the Anhui Clique was formed when Duan began training the war participation army.[2] As Duan was a leader of the Republic of China, much of the Anhui faction was originally part of the former Beiyang government.

Zhili Clique and Cao Kun: Following the Hunanese invasion, the Hupeh revolts erupted. What was so important about the Hupeh revolts was that they led to the rise of Cao Kun, a military general under Duan. Cao Kun's affiliation with Feng Guozhang, also an army general under Duan and the Acting President of the Republic of China, would enable Cao Kun to succeed Feng as leader of the Zhili Clique.[2] The Zhili Clique resulted from a direct split of the Beiyang government between the Zhili and the Anhui Clique. It is noted that Cao was affiliated with Duan, but Cao viewed Duan's policies as corrupt, leading Cao to defect to Zhili.[2] The ultimate purpose of the Zhili Clique was to retain the balance of power so that the Anhui clique would not get so strong.

Fengtian Clique: The Fengtian Clique was primarily in Manchuria and was headed by Zhang Zuolin. Its origins can be traced back to before the 1911 revolution. In 1907, Xu Shichang was appointed viceroy of Manchuria, with General Zhang Zuolin under his command.[2] The Fengtian Clique would have maintained a strict military dictatorship until the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in the Mukden Incident of 1931. Zhang Zuolin's son would be crucial in convincing Chiang Kai-shek to fight the Japanese rather than the communists.

The Anhui Clique (1916-1926):

The Zhili-Anhui Split

As you may recall from the previous section, Duan Qirui served as the prime minister of the Beiyang Government from 1917 to 1926.[1.] Dr. Zhongping Chen states, "The Beiyang warlord group gradually split as Feng and Duan, respectively, pursued a peaceful reconciliation policy or a military unification policy regarding the southwestern provinces".[7] However, there are many differences between Feng and Duan, such as how China would be governed and their military strategies; their primary goals would be to create a unified China under their regimes.

Yuan's death left China in a succession crisis, but what ultimately determined who became elected and appointed to high political offices was the support of the provinces. Provinces were split between politicians such as Duan, Cao, and Feng. Although these individuals held high-ranking positions in the Beiyang government, the Beiyang government was little more than a shadow of a failed unified republic. Duan, Cao, and Feng were also leaders of their respective cliques during their time in office. Provinces that supported these individuals would fall into the cliques of that individual. For example, the military governors of Fengtian, Shandong, Shanxi, Chekiang, Anhui, and Gansu pressured Feng Guozhang to appoint Cao Kun.[1] Although the provinces of Fengtian and Anhui stand out in that they later fought against the Zhili clique led by Cao Kun, the other provinces of Shaanxi and Shanxi were firmly under the control of the Zhili Clique. The provinces of Anhui, Chekiang, and Kansu would be under their control after the Anhui-Zhili War.[1]

The Beiyang government's decentralization allowed provincial warlords, such as those from Anhui and Zhili, to tear it apart.[7] Duan controlled the Anhui faction and secured loans from Japan during World War I, which helped him secure sufficient funds for his political party within the clique, the Anfu Club.[7] This political party aimed to establish a "parliament" to garner the support of warlords already within the Beiyang government, thereby gaining more power than

the Zhili clique, which also sought to achieve the same goal. This economic relationship would lead to a pro-Japanese policy in Duan's Anhui government, which granted the Japanese stations in outer Manchuria in exchange for loans.[7]

What distinguishes the Anhui Clique from the Zhili Clique? Dr. Jerome Chen emphasizes that the Anhui Clique is more centralized compared to the Zhili Clique.[2] The Anhui Clique was under the control of Duan, while the Zhili Clique was under the control of multiple warlords, including Feng, Wu, and Cao.[1] Dr. Zhongping Chen stated, "President Feng relied mainly on support from the so-called three military governors of the Yangzi River valley (Changjiang Sandu). The three generals—Li Chun in Jiangsu, Chen Guangyuan in Jiangxi, and Wang Zhanyuan in Hubei".[7] The Zhili Clique appeared to be more potent, with more warlords, which meant more armies; however, the Anhui Clique had Japanese support, who were thought to intervene if the Anhui were attacked. These two cliques differed little in their origins, but they differed significantly in their power and armies. After all, their goal as warlords is to dominate China, making their campaigns very similar.

When and how did the Anhui Clique formally cede from the Beiyang government? Experts, such as Dr. Chi, believe that the split occurred after a constitutional crisis in 1917.[1] Although he did not explicitly state that Anhui ceded during this time, Zhili did cede, which would imply that Anhui ceded to preserve the balance of power. Another factor that may have contributed to the ceding of Anhui is the establishment of the War Participation Army, which effectively established military dominance, thereby threatening other provinces into declaring sovereignty.[1] The start of the paper mentions Wu Peifu's negligence in staying loyal to Yuan, as he was technically not an emperor. It is also important to note that Wu was known as the Philosopher General and was deeply influenced by Confucianism.[2] Dr. Jerome Chen argues

that the warlords were superstitious and deeply influenced by Confucianism, leading them to reject many enlightened and Western ideals.[2] Although Yuan tried to use Confucian ideals to legitimize his right as emperor, he "tried to rule a country that removed its Confucian institutions by applying Confucian political principles".[2] Like Wu Peifu, his fellow warlords in the Zhili Clique were generally conservative. Duan's radical and militaristic policies clashed with Feng and Cao's conservative and diplomatic approaches. Ultimately, differences such as militaristic strategies, conservative versus radical approaches, and the balance of power led to the split of the Zhili and Anhui from the Beiyang government.

The Zhili-Anhui War (1920)

Tensions stemming from the split between the Zhili and Anhui, or the constitutional crisis of 1917, eventually led to the Zhili-Anhui War.[9] This conflict lasted only four days, from July 14th to July 18th.[9] Duan's army was arguably the most potent and Westernized among all the warlords of China, with Japan training troops from Anhui.

How did this elite army fall to the likes of the Zhili Clique? The Zhili Clique in central China entered a pact with the Fengtian Clique in Northern Manchuria.[9] On July fourteenth, the Anhui clique, dividing its army into two divisions, attacked the Zhili on two fronts.[9] Wu Peifu led his army and defeated the Anhui division on the Western Front. The Fengtian Clique, still holding to this pact, attacked the Eastern front of Anhui. The political heart of Anhui had been invaded, leaving the last division's general to flee, practically surrendering the entire army to the Zhili. On July 19th, a combined force of Zhili-Fengtian soldiers took Beijing.[9] It is essential to note that the Anhui Clique was sandwiched between the Zhili and Fengtian, and its only advantage was its coastal areas, which ultimately aided the general and Duan in their escape.

There were few casualties in the Zhili-Anhui War because it was limited to a small number of participants and primarily affected areas near railroads. After all, that is where the Anhui were supplied.[1] The Anhui territory was vast, but it was not all connected, meaning it had to go through the Zhili Clique to reach the coastal areas and back.

What were the effects of the Zhili-Anhui war? The most overwhelming impact of this was the dissolution of the Anhui Clique. The Anhui Clique still retained some territory in the coastal areas of Chekiang and Fukien, but its political faction was essentially dissolved. Anhui lost its central government, its army, and the Anfu club, which essentially meant that it lost control of the parliament.[1] With its leader in exile and no military, it simply became irrelevant, and the Zhili Clique came to influence the rest of its coastal territory. Duan took refuge with the Japanese and later returned to China to serve as the Chief Executive of the Beiyang government in 1924.

The Anhui Clique territory would be divided between the Fengtian Clique, with the northern provinces allocated to Fengtian and the southern provinces allocated to Zhili.[1] The Zhili also took possession of Beijing, thereby gaining immense political prestige as the "legitimate China." Tensions from this war led to the next. For example, Wu Peifu accused the Fengtian Clique of arriving on the last day of the war to divide the spoils, weaponry, and territory with Anhui.[1] These accusations would anger the Zhili Clique, paving the way for the next war: the Fengtian-Zhili War.

The Zhili Clique (1916-1928):

Rise of the Zhili Clique

After Yuan's death, which led to the fragmentation of China, Feng Guozhang emerged as one of the founders of the Zhili Clique. Feng was the acting president of the Beiyang government and tried to initiate diplomacy with Duan, the acting premier and leader of the Anhui

Clique.[1] Feng Guozhang's stance on diplomacy has proven to be a recurring theme throughout the history of the Zhili Clique, especially in helping to balance the interests of the South and the North. After the formal Anhui-Zhili split, Duan would be the leader of the Anhui Clique, and Feng would be the leader of the Zhili Clique.[7]

As you may recall, Feng was absent during the Zhili-Anhui War of 1920. Feng would pass away in 1919 because of illness. Cao Kun would succeed him as leader of the Zhili Clique, and Wu Peifu, although not the leader, was a high-ranking warlord under Cao.[2] It is essential to note that the Zhili clique was not as fully centralized as its rival, the Anhui Clique, which meant that warlords acted virtually independently but might be confronted by Cao himself if something went awry. In this section of the paper, the Zhili-Fengtian War will be discussed, and then we will delve into the notable warlords of the Zhili Clique: Wu Peifu and Feng Yuxiang.

The First Zhili-Fengtian War

Tensions from the 1920 Zhili-Anhui War bled into the First Zhili-Fengtian War of 1922.[12] Wu was furious because the Fengtian Clique arrived on the last day of the war, allowing them to divide the spoils.[1] Wu claimed that since the Zhili Clique suffered casualties and dared to take on the Anhui Clique, despite their vast modern army, they should receive all the spoils of war, North and South. Wu denounced Zhang Zuolin publicly, which also helped initiate the conflict.[12] After the Zhili-Anhui War, the Zhili Clique, which had more territory, meaning it could access a larger portion of the surrounding territories, decided to expand outward.[1] Wu's aggressive attitude during the Zhili-Anhui War remained unchanged until the defeat of Zhang Zuolin in the First Zhili-Fengtian War.[2] Wu's territorial expansion into Hupeh, as well as a portion of Hunan, infuriated Zhang, as it disrupted the balance of power established after the Zhili-Anhui War, when they divided up the spoils.[1] Another reason for this war is the conflict between the

Fengtian and Zhili Clique, which fought to establish loyalists in the cabinet of the Beiyang government.[1] At this point, the Beiyang government is essentially a shell of what was once China's sole government. By this time, its government power was deteriorating, if not eliminated. Still, warlords saw the Beiyang government as valuable, as it had the right to be the "legitimate" China. Therefore, installing loyalists in the cabinet of the Beiyang government would make the cliques more politically influential. Factors such as unsettled disputes, territorial concerns, and political conflicts contributed to the initiation of the First Zhili-Fengtian War in 1922. The Fengtian and Zhili cliques attempted to negotiate peace agreements before the war, exchanging ambassadors back and forth, but to no avail.[1] The war began on April 10, 1922.

Although the Fengtian Clique had Japanese support, Wu used this by saying that they were merely Japanese imperialists, reducing their political prestige as a "legitimate" China.[12] The Fengtian Clique, specifically the warlord Zhang Zongchang, employed European mercenaries, particularly from Russia. On the other hand, the Zhili Clique was working with the Italians.[12] Although the Italians were working with the Zhili Clique, they only shipped military supplies, while the Japanese actively helped the Fengtian Clique by providing arms, military advisors, and intelligence.[12]

The Zhili Clique was a formidable foe, and with its integration of former Anhui forces into its military, its army was nearly unstoppable with machine guns. Although the Zhili Clique's army, on paper, consisted of 250,000 men, it was actually comprised of approximately 100,000 men.[12] To ensure Fengtian's victory, Zhang sent emissaries to Kwangtung to seek an alliance with Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang.[1] Zhang also allied with the remnants of the Anhui Clique in Chekiang and Fukien, which made a tripartite pact with the Fengtian Clique, the Kuomintang, and the Anhui Clique.[1]

The tripartite alliance agreed in March to attack in April: The Fengtian Clique from the North, the Kuomintang from the south, and the Anhui remnants from the coastal areas of the East. Before the war, the Zhili Clique sent ambassadors to the Fengtian Clique to seek out a peaceful solution. Still, the Fengtian Clique demanded that the Zhili Clique withdraw any loyalists from the Beiyang government and also stop meddling in Chinese affairs.[1] They would attack four days later.

The Fengtian invaded the Zhili Clique on April 10, 1922. Unfortunately for the Fengtian Clique, the Kuomintang had to withdraw due to internal struggles in the South.[12] Since the Kuomintang was unable to launch an attack on the Zhili Clique, the Anhui remnants lacked support, and as a result, they withdrew from the attack.[1] Many of the major battles took place in Beijing, particularly at the Marco Polo Bridge.[12] The only reason the Zhili Clique managed to take Beijing was that Zhili Warlord Feng Yuxiang performed a daring flank against Zhang's forces, driving them back and stirring panic among the Fengtian ranks.[12] Within a week, not only were the Fengtian forces driven out of Beijing, but they were also driven even farther north up to the Great Wall.[1]

The war ended on June 18th with the defeat of the Fengtian Clique. The Fengtian defeat was attributed to the failure of its tripartite attack, which was organized a month prior, as well as the inferiority of the Fengtian military compared to the Zhili military.[1]

What were the effects of the war? The Zhili Clique's victory in the war did not bring stability.[12] The Zhili Clique emerged as the dominant force in Chinese politics and was at the center of Chinese affairs. The Fengtian Clique could only heal from its wounds; the Kuomintang was practically in ruins, and since the Anhui Clique had not participated in the war, it remained unscathed.[1] After the war, the Zhili Clique deposed the government. Still, instead of putting a

loyalist to the presidency, they selected Li Yuanhong, former Vice President of the Republic of China, to be President.[1] What was so significant about this is that installing Li to the presidency demonstrated a movement towards constitutional legitimacy for the people of China. Nevertheless, the Zhili Clique deposed Li in 1923, illegally electing Cao as the President.[1] Additionally, Zhili would suffer internal divisions and disagreements over policies.

The Second Zhili-Fengtian War

Tensions from the First Zhili-Fengtian War barely died down before they bled into the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. Cao Kun's illegal rise to the presidency was marked by bribery and corruption, which led the Fengtian Clique to believe that the Zhili Clique was unstable. Additionally, Zhang was determined to reorganize the failed coalition of the Anhui Clique and the Kuomintang. Duan Qirui, who had been exiled from China after the Zhili-Anhui War, had come back to assert his control over the Anhui Clique. Duan strived for influence, and Zhang deemed him an ally since the Zhili Clique devastated the Anhui Clique. It could be argued that this war isn't technically a different war from that of the First Zhili-Fengtian War since it encompasses many of the same grievances, only with an interwar period separating them.

Notable events that occurred during the interwar period, aside from the rise of Cao Kun as President, include the reforming of the Fengtian Army and the emergence of Sun's Kuomintang as the dominant power in the South.[1] After Zhang's defeat in the First Zhili-Fengtian War, he immediately began reforming his army. He implemented a reform program that recruited soldiers with modern military education, drastically improving his army.[1] This reform program demonstrated autonomy from the central Beiyang government. Since the Zhili Clique felt threatened by the Fengtian Clique's efforts to build an army, they sent emissaries to the Fengtian Clique to halt its army construction.[1] This plea only infuriated the

Fengtian Clique, which threatened to formally break away from the central government. This suggests that neither side was ready for a full-out confrontation or even a war. The Second Zhili-Fengtian War was inevitable, but since both sides continually delayed the conflict, the Fengtian Clique had more time to train its troops, and Sun had more time to plan his Northern Expedition.[1] In 1924, Sun and later Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek founded the Whampoa Military Academy.[12] Sun's involvement with the Fengtian Clique meant that he had to plan the Northern Expedition, a feat that would only be completed by Chiang. Sun's military academy would help contribute to the Northern Expedition. The Sun would not complete the Northern Expedition during this war, but this is still significant because the war weakened the Warlord Cliques, setting the stage for Chiang's reunification of China. Additionally, the Kuomintang's alliance with the Fengtian and Anhui cliques ensured its continued political influence following the defeat of the Zhili Clique.

War broke out on September 15th, 1924. The fighting began when the Anhui Clique clashed with the Zhili Clique, and subsequently, the Anhui Clique sought assistance from their ally, the Fengtian Clique.[12] The Zhili Clique was surrounded by the Fengtian and Anhui Cliques, which meant that Wu had divided his 250,000-man army into three divisions to deal with both forces sufficiently.[12] Although Wu ordered Feng to attack Zhang in the west, Feng defied Wu because he viewed Wu as a rival.[12] Feng had been a unique warlord among the Zhili Clique because he introduced progressive reforms and Christian doctrines within his territory.[12] When offered a bribe by the Japanese, Feng decided to pull back his forces, send them to Beijing, and arrest President Cao Kun.[12]

The Anhui Clique did not play a significant role militarily, but Wu did divide his army in case the Anhui military tried to invade, which may have been a factor in Fengtian's victory. The

coup in which Feng seized Beijing, also known as the Beijing Coup, helped Duan Qirui return to Chinese politics as Provisional Chief Executive of the Beijing government, with the approval of Feng and Zhang. Duan continued to act as the figurehead of the Anhui Clique.

Wu was done for. Wu's forces had to retreat to Hubei.[12] Feng's betrayal sparked a decline in morale among Zhili troops, and Wu's attempt to restore Zhili's rule to Beijing was futile, ending in a catastrophic retreat of his forces.[1] The Zhili Clique's political influence was over, and the Fengtian Clique emerged victorious from the war. Although its political domination ended, it still had territory beyond the Yangtze River.[1]

The victory of the Fengtian Clique was attributed to Feng's betrayal of the Zhili Clique. After the war, Zhang and Feng split the spoils of territory amongst themselves.[12]

Wu Peifu, the Philosopher General

During the Zhili-Anhui war, Wu Peifu played a prominent role in securing the Zhili Clique's victory by defeating the Anhui Clique on the Western Front.[9] Wu's participation in the war was crucial, as Beijing, the capital of the Beiyang government, was under the control of the Zhili Clique from 1917 to 1924.[10] Wu's crucial role in the Zhili-Anhui War and the later First Zhili-Fengtian War helped secure Northern and even Central China, making him the dominant figure of the North.[10]

How did Wu Peifu rise to prominence in the Zhili Clique? Wu was pushed into the military, but he did receive a classical education, which is evident in his push for Confucian values and ideals, earning him the title of "Philosopher General".[11] In 1902, Wu enrolled in Yuan Shikai's Peking military academy, associated with the New Army, later known as the Beiyang Army.[11] Wu served in Yuan's New Army as an officer for the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War.[11] After Yuan's ascendency to the role of President of the Republic of China following the

1911 revolution, Wu was promoted to brigade commander with the rank of colonel.[11] During the years of the short-lived republic, Wu's military career would advance quickly.[11] Cao Kun was Wu's division commander, which helps explain how Wu became associated with the later Zhili Clique. Yuan's death would land Wu the Chief Bulwark of the Beijing government.[10] The Zhili-Anhui split led to the formation of new cliques, which made Wu a prominent warlord.

Wu's performance during the Zhili-Anhui War of 1920 and the First Zhili-Fengtian War of 1922 increased his prominence as a warlord, especially in Northern China.[12] During the Zhili-Fengtian War of 1922, Wu demonstrated his military valor by successfully defending Beijing against the Fengtian Clique while also managing to defend the Zhili Clique against the Anhui Clique. Remember, the Fengtian Clique not only had Japanese support but also formed a tripartite pact with the Anhui Clique and the Kuomintang.[12]

Two incidents contributed to the downfall of Wu and his decline in prominence on the Chinese stage. In 1923, Wu brutally suppressed a strike on the Beijing-Hankou Railroad, which was his territory's primary source of income.[10] This incident made Wu deeply unpopular, particularly among the working class, which was the majority of his people. The second incident was during the Second Zhili-Fengtian War of 1924. Feng Yuxiang, a fellow Zhili Warlord, performed the Beijing coup, which overthrew Cao Kun from the presidency and handed over Beijing to the Fengtian Clique. Feng's betrayal decreased the morale of Wu's troops, and during this coup, Wu relied on him to assist him on the Northern Front.[11]

Wu's defeat drove him and his army into a retreat.[12] Wu took a step back from politics but then reemerged to successfully seek revenge against Feng.[11] After defeating his rival, Wu was still not as prominent as he was before the war. In 1926, Wu's territory was subject to the Northern Expedition by Chiang Kai-shek, who succeeded Sun as Generalissimo of the Kuomintang.[11] Wu

would take refuge in Sichuan province with former soldiers of his defeated army.[11] Wu's prominence would slowly decrease over the years. Wu offered to head a puppet government in Japanese territories, but that didn't lead anywhere.[11] Wu later offered to lead an army of 500,000 men, but the Japanese declined that offer as well.[11] Wu died in 1939 due to blood poisoning and had an elaborate memorial to remember the once-great Zhili Warlord.

Feng Yuxiang, the Christian General

Feng was one of the most influential Zhili Warlords after the fall of the Zhili Warlords in the Second Zhili-Fengtian War of 1924. Feng would most famously be involved with Chiang Kai-shek, his sworn brother, in helping complete the Northern Expedition, which ultimately unified China.

Like other warlords, Feng enlisted in the military at a young age.[13] It was only when he was 11 years old that a friend of his father enrolled him in the military. Although it was common practice to enlist young children into the military to receive their pay, it was highly competitive.[14] Feng would train in the military for a decade, dreaming of becoming a drill leader. It was in 1902 that Feng enrolled in Yuan Shikai's army, where he commanded over 500 volunteers, which grew to over 100,000 men by 1918.[14] Feng's excessive skill and command in the military proved him to be a great commander to future Zhili leader Cao Kun.

In 1914, he was appointed as a shi zhang, or military-level division teacher, by the Beiyang government and eventually became a commander-in-chief.[13] This gave him significant control over Northern China. After Yuan's death, Feng aligned himself with the Zhili Clique headed by Cao Kun and Wu Peifu. Much of his army relied on faulty bayonets, grenades, and a traditional Chinese melee weapon known as the Da Dao.[14] His army was well-versed in

bayonet and knife training.[14] This mix of traditional and modern weaponry made Feng's army a formidable force to be dealt with.

Although he was initially critical of Christianity, that all changed when he was treated in a mission hospital in Beijing.[13] Feng was baptized in 1912 and is known for introducing Christian doctrines to his military while he was a warlord.[13] This would earn him the nickname "Christian General." These Christian doctrines greatly benefited his army, as prohibiting practices such as smoking made soldiers less likely to defect.[14] Additionally, by reinforcing the idea of heaven, soldiers had a "dare to die" attitude similar to that of Japanese soldiers dying for honor.[14] During his years out of the spotlight, Feng would govern with Christian doctrines. Feng prohibited his soldiers from engaging in practices such as smoking and gambling, and he also urged his men to become protestants.[15] This was also evident in Feng's governing style over the citizens, as many of the laws aligned with those of the bible. Although he was a firm advocate of Christianity, he hated how European powers used Christianity as the pretext for setting up spheres of influence in China. For this same reason, Feng fired a European Champlain.[13]

Feng acted as a warlord and was essentially autonomous. Feng would not get his big break until the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. In 1924, he helped overthrow the political authority amid the war, removing Cao Kun as President and allowing the Japanese-backed Fengtian Clique to receive bribes from the Japanese.[12] Feng would rise in prominence after the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. He got a great head start to expand his influence after he split the spoils of territory with the Fengtian Clique. Since he was not part of the Zhili Clique that he betrayed, he reorganized his army into the Kuomintang, also known as the People's Army.[15] Compared to other warlords, Feng's army was unique in that it advocated for social welfare and reformist

policies. Because of his policies and similar socialist ideas, the Soviet Union supported Feng and sent him multiple Soviet Advisors to his army.[15]

Although Feng was initially friendly with Zhang Zuolin, they slowly became distant over the years. Tensions resulting from ideological differences and territorial disputes led Zhang to attack Feng's troops, nearly devastating his entire political career.[15] Thanks to Soviet support, Feng was able to revitalize his army after it was devastated by Zhang.[15]

Feng would team up with Chiang Kai-shek to aid him in the Northern Expedition. In 1927, Feng would be the National Revolutionary Army's second command-in-chief. Unfortunately, Feng's participation in the Kuomintang soured his relationship with the Soviets since the Kuomintang was deliberately targeting communists during the Great Purge.[15] Feng would serve an essential role during the Northern Expedition, but like all his other relations, his relationship with the Kuomintang also soured. In 1928, Feng took over Beijing with another Warlord and declared independence from the Kuomintang.[15] Feng was overwhelmed by the Kuomintang and lost his independence, as did Beijing.

Feng's political career wasn't over. Feng headed the Anti-Japanese Alliance army and unsuccessfully invaded Japanese territories with a group of volunteers.[15] Many could argue that this was an attempt to gain popularity. Still, it can also be argued that invading the Japanese with a group of volunteers directly opposed Chiang's anti-communist policies as a priority. Chiang prioritized purging the communists, and no matter what anybody told him, he decided that the communists were a threat to China, not the invading Japanese. Only after the Xi'an incident in 1936, led by Zhang Xueliang, did Chiang realize that the Japanese were the real threat. Feng, originally sworn to Chiang Kai-shek, spent much of his final years in the United

States, denouncing Chiang for starting the Civil War. In 1948, Feng died in a fire on a return voyage aboard a Soviet ship in the Black Sea.

The Fengtian Clique (1916-1928):

Rise of the Fengtian Clique

Like the Zhili and Anhui Cliques, the Fengtian Clique arose after the death of Yuan Shikai. Unlike the other cliques, its split did not occur from the Zhili-Anhui Clique but from the alliance of Zhang and multiple elites of Fengtian province, which directly defied orders from the Beiyang government.[16] The Fengtian Alliance consisted of the three central provinces of Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang.[16] Remember, geographically, these provinces are located in Manchuria, which is west of Korea, and Korea, in turn, is adjacent to Japan. During the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan defeated China, exerting its influence on Korea. Japan began occupying Korea in 1905. Although Korea would serve as a foothold for China in Japan's eyes, for now, it only acted as the Fengtian Clique's biggest supporter through financial support, weaponry, and intelligence.[16] The Fengtian Clique's friendly relationship with Japan enabled Japanese merchants to sell their goods in Manchuria, which had a positive impact on local business.

As mentioned in the previous sections of this paper, the Fengtian Clique's involvement with other cliques. The Fengtian Clique had a significant impact on China's geopolitical landscape. For example, the Fengtian Clique was in the Zhili-Anhui War of 1920, the First Zhili-Fengtian War of 1922, and the Second Zhili-Fengtian War of 1924. Its role in these wars was primarily through alliances. Here are examples from each of the wars: In the Zhili-Anhui War, the Fengtian Clique allied with the Zhili Clique at the end of the war; In the First Zhili-Fengtian War, the Fengtian attempted to make a pact between the remnants of the Anhui

Clique and Sun's Kuomintang; In the Second Zhili-Fengtian War, the Fengtian Clique successfully allied with the Anhui Clique and Kuomintang. Above all, the Fengtian Clique's most notable achievement is its defeat of the Zhili Clique, enabling Chiang to later complete his Northern Expedition.

This section of the paper will also focus on numerous leaders and warlords of this particular clique. Among the warlords we will be discussing are Zhang Zuolin, Zhang Zongchang, and Zhang Xueliang. We will also discuss the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Mukden incident.

Zhang Zuolin, the Mukden Tiger, and the Old Marshal

Zhang was born into a peasant family and enlisted in the army.[16] Ironically, Zhang fought in the First Sino-Japanese War. This is ironic because, throughout Zhang's political career as the leader of the Fengtian Clique, Japan provided funds and military support for the Fengtian Clique. To top it all off, Zhang was killed by the Japanese during the Mukden incident, serving as a pretext to wage war against China during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Zhang is similar to the leaders of other Warlord Cliques, such as Duan or Cao, in that they were all involved in the military during their youth and also played a role in the formation of the Beiyang government under Yuan Shikai. Zhang would not be as associated with Yuan as Duan or Cao, who would become dominant within the Beijing government.

Zhang's poverty led him to work at a stable in an inn.[17] In this inn, Zhang would be associated with bandit groups, an essential step in his path to becoming the leader of the Fengtian Clique. By 1896, Zhang was known for his activities in an infamous bandit group.[17] His involvement with organized crime enabled Zhang to develop the leadership skills necessary to become the leader of the Fengtian Clique.

Zhang's group of bandits helped him in his rise in the military. For example, in 1900, Zhang's group joined the imperial Qing army to suppress the Boxer Rebellion. Another prominent example was during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, when the Japanese hired Zhang and his gang as mercenaries.[17] Incorporating his gang into military activities helped Zhang gain prevalence and recognition, which contributed to his popularity and relevance during the early Republican era.

Using his gang, Zhang led a local militia.[16] This local militia would gain the recognition of the Fengtian province governor, who transformed it into an official regiment. Unlike Duan or Cao, Zhang wasn't as closely connected to Yuan Shikai, which explains why the Fengtian Clique did not clash with them during the Zhili-Anhui split.[16] It was during the 1911 Revolution that Zhang gained recognition for suppressing rebellions, which earned him the title "Vice Minister of Military Affairs".[17] Between 1912 and 1920, Zhang gained multiple titles, eventually becoming the supreme leader of Manchuria. A key moment in Zhang's rise was when Yuan, seeking to gain Zhang's support, sent him a shipment of military provisions, which Zhang used to crush his political opponents.[18] This action helped eliminate his political rivals and allowed Yuan to receive multiple titles from the declining Manchu Court, further legitimizing his political career.[17]

After Yuan died in 1916, the Beiyang government appointed Zhang the governor of Fengtian province.[18] Furthermore, in 1920, the central government recognized Zhang as the Governor-General of the Eastern Provinces, making Zhang the Supreme Leader.[18] Remember that Zhang was a seasoned general and military leader. Although Zhang primarily legitimized his political career from approximately 1916 to 1920, he frequently engaged in the field, building on the leadership skills he had developed during his days as a bandit.

Zhang would expand his influence into the three provinces of Manchuria: Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. These provinces would be the basis of the Fengtian Clique. Although not formally sovereign, Zhang controlled Manchuria as an autonomous state from the Beiyang government.

The Japanese initially supported the Fengtian Clique through financial aid and military assistance. After winning the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese gained control of the outpost of Kwangtung in Manchuria, which included a port linked to Japan.[18] Additionally, the Japanese acquired railroads from Russia, which helped with their business. Japan would exert its influence on the Fengtian region, which made it economically prosperous; however, Japanese monopolies were still making it hard for people to buy what they needed.

From 1920 to 1924, Zhang was involved in multiple wars (many of which were discussed in this paper) with the Anhui and Zhili Cliques. These wars would result in the devastation of the Anhui Clique by an alliance of the Zhili and Fengtian and the destruction of the Zhili Clique by a coalition of the Anhui and Fengtian. Zhang's involvement in alliances during these wars enabled him to gain the spoils from the Zhili-Anhui War and a significant portion of the territory of the Zhili Clique from the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. During the Second Zhili-Fengtian War, Feng Yuxiang allied with the Fengtian Clique and staged a coup to seize control of Beijing. Tensions between Feng and the Fengtian Clique eventually allowed the Fengtian Clique to take over Beijing in 1926, only to lose it to the Kuomintang in 1928.[18]

In Zhang's retreat from Beijing, he was riding a train on the morning of June 4, 1928.[17] Remember, the Japanese controlled the South Manchurian Railroad, which they acquired as spoils from the Russo-Japanese War. Komoto Daisaku of the Japanese Kwantung Army planted a bomb on the railroad and exploded it when Zhang's train was overtaken, killing Zhang.[18] It

could be argued that the Japanese were impatient with Zhang's struggle against Chiang. Still, it could also be argued that the Japanese simply used the incident as a pretext to invade Manchuria and then China, knowing it could take on the might of the Kuomintang Army. For example, the Japanese army claimed that a Chinese soldier planted the bomb, and since the bomb was on their property, it could rightfully be used as a pretext to invade Manchuria. This would be known as the Huanggutun incident.

Zhang Zuolin was succeeded by Zhang Xueliang, who played a significant role in convincing Chiang to retaliate against the Japanese. Eventually, the Japanese would establish a puppet government known as Manchukuo, restoring the Qing dynasty under Emperor Puyi.

Zhang Zongchang, the Dogmeat General

Zhang is known throughout his life as wicked and is the epitome of the term "warlord." Zhang was born into an impoverished family in Shandong, where his mother, a practicing witch, and his father, a barber and musician, lived.[19] Zhang could be contrasted with Feng Yuxiang. Feng was a fair general who ruled his territory with Christian doctrine, while Zhang ruled with an iron fist and was the poster boy for all that was evil in 1920s China.

Like Zhang Zuolin, Zhang started his career as a bandit through organized crime.[19] Zhang would be enrolled in the military in his youth, and he would command Russian divisions in Siberia.[19] During the 1911 Revolution, Zhang and a group of bandits led a rebellion against the Qing dynasty. Zhang would rise through the ranks as he joined the Fengtian Clique. The stage was set for Zhang to become a great warlord under the Fengtian Clique.

Zhang had access to the latest military technology, which significantly expanded his territory, and his army was ruthless. In his territory, he essentially ruled a militaristic dictatorship, squeezing tax money out of peasants. Due to his background in Siberia, Zhang employed White

Russian mercenaries, which significantly enhanced his army.[19] To assert his dominance, Zhang reportedly destroyed a temple of the local god of his territory and shot multiple artillery missiles into the sky to show who was boss. To address inflation and appear to be paying his men more, Zhang continued to make more and more money, insisting that the cost remained the same. That's not how money works, so soldiers forced civilians to take the money at its proposed value, even though it was practically worth nothing.

Why was Zhang called the Dogmeat General? Dr. Portwood and Dr. Dunn state, "He was the 'Dog Meat General,' a northern Chinese euphemism that recorded his extreme fascination with a domino-like game called pai jiu".[19] It is also reported that he ate dog meat, eating Chow Chow meat every day, which was believed to increase virility. Zhang was also known as the "Three Don't Knows" because he was uncertain about the number of men in his army, the amount of money he owned, and the number of concubines he had.[19] The concubine problem became so severe that he had to assign a number to each of his 30 to 50 concubines.

Zhang's most significant contribution to Chinese history, aside from highlighting the evils of warlordism, was during the Second Zhili-Fengtian War. After Feng Yuxiang's coup, Zhang was free to rush and sack Shanghai after the defeat of Wu and Cao.[15] Zhang was squeezed out of Shanghai, but as a former bandit, Zhang sympathized with the city's vast criminal network and even aided them, showing how despicable Zhang was.

Zhang would control Shandong province from 1918 to 1928. These years especially highlighted civil unrest among civilians in response to Zhang's rule. Zhang's army destroyed the economy and printed out so much money that it made the provincial currency worthless.[19] Zhang would not allow for any criticism. To assert his dominance over the Shandong population, Zhang produced "split melons" or severed heads that hung from telegraph lines to show what

would happen to them if anybody spoke out. Still, peasants could not stand for this injustice. Peasants formed the Red Spear Militia, and despite being poorly armed, they were still brave enough to fight Zhang's advanced warlord army.[19] While his forces were terrorizing Shandong, Zhang himself enjoyed his headquarters in Jinan, which resembled a medieval court, signaling Zhang was the King of Shandong.[19] Dr. Portwood and Dr. Dunn mention an author at this time: "Popular cross-cultural writer Lin Yutang, who Zhang's police chased out of 1926 Beijing, sarcastically described this regime as 'the most colorful, legendary, medieval, and unashamed in modern China'".[19]

Zhang's demise occurred not from the Zhili Clique but rather from the Northern Expedition conducted by the Kuomintang. The Northern Expedition in 1928 officially ended Zhang's rule in Shandong.[19] The only reason the Kuomintang didn't expand into Manchuria was that the Japanese began to intervene, and Chiang feared he could not take on the full might of the Japanese army.

He made several attempts to retake Shandong, and when those failed, he declared that he would aid Japan in occupying Manchuria. His declaration occurred in 1932, following the Mukden Incident, which served as a pretext for Japan's invasion of Manchuria. Zhang spent some time in Japan during his self-imposed exile after being defeated repeatedly. Zhang would group with fellow warlords and be prepared to travel by train to Beijing from Jinan. It was on September 3, 1932, when Zhang was gunned down by the nephew of an officer he executed.[19] Zhang's terrorizing of Shandong came back to haunt him, a deserved end for arguably the most despicable warlord of the Warlord Era.

The Mukden Incident

The Huanggutun incident, which was orchestrated by the Japanese Kwantung Army to assassinate Zhang Zuolin, was the first significant step in Japanese expansion in Manchuria. Zuolin's death profoundly destabilized the Fengtian Clique, as his son, Zhang Xueliang, succeeded him. By this time, the Fengtian Clique was engaged in multiple conflicts with the Kuomintang. Chiang's Northern Expedition failed to invade the Fengtian Clique. From 1925 to 1926, the Kuomintang and the Fengtian Clique were engaged in the Anti-Fengtian War, which ultimately led to the Kuomintang's defeat, allowing Fengtian to seize control of Beijing.[20] What was so significant about this war was that the Japanese were backing the Fengtian Clique, which made Chiang fearful of the Japanese, potentially influencing his reluctance to fight them until 1937.[20] Zhang Xueliang, knowing that the Japanese killed his father, supported the Kuomintang later in his career, prompting the Mukden Incident.

On September 18, 1931, a bomb exploded on a railroad near the city of Mukden.[21] Remember now, the Fengtian Clique was once in an alliance with Japan, where the Japanese would offer military supplies and intelligence, while the Fengtian Clique offered ports and railroads, which would boost business in Manchuria. The Japanese, who were the ones who planted the bomb, owned the railroad and accused the Chinese of bombing the railroad as a sign that they were hostile.[21] Essentially, Japan had no reason to invade Manchuria, so it created one. The Mukden Incident served as the pretext for invading Manchuria.[21] A controversy that I would like to discuss is that ultranationalist low-level officers most likely planted the bomb and did not gain approval from the government. However, they assumed that Japan should rule Pan-Asia. Within months of the incident, Japan occupied the entirety of Manchuria and declared it a sovereign nation, known as Manchukuo.[21] What would happen to Zhang Xueliang? Zhang's

prestige as leader of the Fengtian Clique decreased because of his lack of resistance to the Japanese. He would retreat to a Northern Stronghold and continue to serve the Kuomintang as a prominent military commander. Zhang's most significant impact on China was highlighted during the Xi'an Incident, which arguably changed the course of Chinese history, prompting Chiang's resistance against the invading Japanese.

The Rise of Manchukuo

Following the disintegration of the Fengtian Clique and the subsequent Japanese takeover, the Japanese established a puppet government known as Manchukuo. As mentioned earlier, the Mukden incident was carried out by low-level officers in the Kwantung Army without proper authorization from the Japanese military.[22] Shortly after, Ugaki Kazushige, the governor-general of Korea, took control of the Kwantung army to formally take control of Manchuria and establish a puppet state.[22] Among other factors that led to the establishment of Manchukuo was the monarchist movements of Manchuria. Manchuria was, after all, the origin of the Qing Dynasty, with its emperors being of ethnic Manchu descent. Puyi was the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty and abdicated at the age of 6. Multiple monarchist movements emerged directly after the 1911 Revolution, and that fire still stood firm, contributing to the rise of Puyi and legitimizing Manchukuo as the "real" China. Fengtian defectors and Mongolian officials also wanted to establish a new state.[22] All of these factors led to the state of Manchukuo.

In February 1932, the Japanese-Manchukuo protocol was signed.[23] To not appear as an invader, Japan took multiple precautions. Japan boasted Manchukuo as an independent state with "Ethnic Harmony" since the Han, Manchurians, Japanese, Koreans, and even Mongolians lived there.[22] Manchuria even accepted displaced people, such as fleeing Poles and Russians from the Soviet Republic, and gained much wealth from its wealthy residents.[22] This is mainly

characterized by their flag, which represents the five-colored flag of the first Chinese Republic: the Han race as red, the Manchurians as yellow, the Mongols as blue, the Hui as white, and the Tibetans as black. The key difference here is that yellow is removed as the second color and encompasses the background of the flag, symbolizing Manchurian dominance over the other races. This Manchurian dominance was quite evident, as many Manchurians held high offices and learned Japanese, enabling them to conduct business with Japan.[22] Another measure that Japan took up was the restoration of Puyi as emperor. Puyi, stripped of his imperial title, was expelled from the Forbidden City and forced to reside in Tianjin during the 1920s. The Japanese accepted Puyi as the Chief Executive to deceive the League of Nations and then formally restored him as Emperor in 1943.

So, how was Manchukuo politically and economically? Manchukuo was still a puppet state at the end of the day, so Japan dispatched multiple bureaucrats to the Manchukuo government.[22] Japan was a brutal colonizer, but it did modernize Manchukuo quite nicely. The Japanese transformed the Manchukuo capital of Xinjiang into a modernized city, complete with a water supply, heating, and sewage systems.[22] Developments in road networks helped businesses, but also enabled the Japanese to dispatch military units, which would prove helpful in their invasion of China. The Japanese were centralizing their government power in Manchukuo and achieved complete control of the Kwantung army through advancements in communications. Manchukuo relied on Japan for industries, and like any good colonizer, Japan extracted Manchukuo's raw materials.[22] This meant that Japan controlled Manchukuo politically, militarily, and economically.

What's so significant about Manchukuo? This represented a sudden shift in Japan's foreign policy.[23] Japan always abided by the Western powers, but its dissatisfaction with its

territories in the Pacific and Qingdao led Japan to stray from the League of Nations. The League of Nations disapproved of Japan's invasion of China, and in response, Japan formally withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933. Japan no longer had to heed the demands of Britain or the United States and could disregard American threats to sever economic ties, as the United States was then in the midst of the Great Depression.[23] Japan was unstoppable, and the only army that Japan somewhat feared was Chiang's Kuomintang army.

Additionally, Manchuria's geographic location right in the middle of the Northeast served Japan as a foothold into China. Since it was a puppet state of Japan, Japan could install its military bases and its arms industries in Manchuria, allowing it to have a steady flow of soldiers into China.[23] While many countries did not recognize Manchukuo as a legitimate state, its military might was indeed legitimate. Its military might was demonstrated during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 against the forces of Chiang Kai-shek. Ultimately, Manchukuo served as a crucial manifestation of Japan's expansionism in Asia and also symbolized Japan's severing of ties with the League of Nations and Western powers, leading to the events of Pearl Harbor and eventually World War II. Manchukuo would ultimately disintegrate after the Soviets invaded it on August 9, 1945.

Zhang Xueliang, the Young Marshall, and the Xi'an Incident

Zhang Zuolin's death in the Huangting incident left his son, Zhang Xueliang, to inherit Fengtian dominance over the Northeast.[24] In his youth, Xueliang received a military education in both China and Japan, enabling him to become an effective general in the Fengtian Army.[25]

Chiang Kai-shek of the Kuomintang Central government launched multiple invasions against the Northern warlords of Fengtian and was locked in essentially a stalemate.[24] Zhang Xueliang distrusted the Japanese since they were the ones who deposed his father, and they

would not hesitate to do the same to him. Xueliang pledged allegiance to Chiang and the central government, allowing for further national unity.[25] This alliance later proved crucial to the future of a united Communist China.

Following the Mukden incident, which enabled Japan to invade Manchuria, possibly due to the growing Kuomintang presence there, Zhang lost legitimacy.[24] Japan took three provinces from Zhang and declared them a sovereign state known as Manchukuo. Many Chinese fled Manchukuo to Zhang, whom they regarded as a genuine Chinese leader. Japan's ever-growing threat prompted Zhang to find an effective way to expel Japan from the mainland.[24]

Although the looming threat of Japan was clear, Chiang targeted the communists instead since he perceived them as a dangerous and internal threat. Although Chiang's predecessor, Sun Yat-sen, accepted aid from Moscow, Chiang severed this relationship quickly after Sun's death.[26] Chiang saw the Communist Party, founded in 1921, as agents of the Soviets, remaining neutral only until the party could enact a nationwide revolution.[26] Initially, it was possible that a CCP member could also be part of the Kuomintang since their ideas did not directly contradict each other. A turning point in Chinese history is April 12, 1927, known as the Shanghai Massacre.[26] In the streets of Shanghai, Chiang dispatched multiple armed men to seize and arrest union leaders and communists, including Future Premier Zhou Enlai.[26] This purge started multiple nationwide purges throughout the Kuomintang, representing a change in attitude against communists. Throughout the next decade, aside from Chiang's hope for a unified China, his primary goal was to crack down on the communists and establish a pure Nationalist state.

After the Japanese assassinated his father and Japan's army took a large portion of Manchuria, Zhang allied with Chiang.[8] Chiang commanded Zhang to suppress the Communists in his portion of Manchuria. However, after several defeats and knowing Chiang's intention to

demote him, Zhang decided that the Japanese were the problem. He agreed that the Nationalists should form a United Front with the Communists to push the Japanese invaders out of China.

It was early on the snowy morning of December 12, 1936, in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Chiang was awake, doing morning exercises, when his chief bodyguard ran into the room and battled Chiang's would-be assassin.[8] Chiang, with two servants, rushed out of the back window and ran towards the mountains, having to scale a 10-foot wall while avoiding their attackers. His bodyguards were shot dead. This was a coordinated attack, with multiple members of Zhang's army organized to capture Chiang. In the snowy mountains, Chiang hid in a cave, exhausted and cold. He was nearly captured two times before he heard soldiers talking outside the cave.[8] Desperate, Chiang turned himself over to the soldiers outside and was taken to Sun Mingjiu, who commanded the attack.[8] Chiang was expected to be killed, but Sun was there to capture him. Without a horse, Sun carried Chiang on his back to the bottom of the mountain, where he was greeted by the military. Chiang was kidnapped in Xi'an. Chiang was taken to the headquarters of Zhang Xueliang, the man who commanded Commander Sun.

This news took China by storm, especially in the Kuomintang. Kuomintang members had rumored that Chiang might be dead, but his wife, Soong May-ling, along with several generals, believed Chiang was alive and that they must go to Xi'an to rescue him.[8] The Communists were thrilled. After all, they spent nearly two years marching 6,000 miles to Shaanxi because of Chiang's purge. They were now granted negotiation power and, in turn, ended the Nationalist-Communist conflict and expelled the Japanese.

What were Zhang's motives in kidnapping Chiang? Although Zhang was assigned to suppress the Communists, Zhou Enlai, a prominent member of the Chinese Communist Party,

had secret talks with Zhang in a Catholic Church.[8] Both of them believed that a pact between the Nationalists and the Communists would be beneficial for both sides and for the expulsion of the Japanese. The end goal was crucial for Zhang, as the Japanese had taken his territory, and he was determined to reclaim it.

In his captivity, Chiang would not eat, talk, or move. Even when threatened at gunpoint, Chiang still refused to get up from his bed. Although Zhang had a strong negotiating position at the time, Kuomintang troops were slowly advancing, and Chiang would not speak to him. He proposed demands such as the reorganization of the Republic of China to align with that of Sun Yat-Sen's Republic of China, the end of the civil war, and the release of political prisoners [8]

This did not escalate into outright conflict. Through telegrams between William Donald, an Australian journalist close to the Chiang family, and May-ling, Chiang's wife, with the Young Marshall, addressing Zhang's grievances in return for Chiang's release. Although not all the grievances Zhang addressed were addressed by Chiang's committee, this incident ultimately led to an end to the civil war and reduced Communist aggression. Donald and May-ling declared to Zhang that they were flying to Xi'an to take back Chiang. Chiang feared that they would kill her, calling Zhang's men a "swarm of bandits and thieves".[8] A brave remark made by May-ling to Donald before entering the building was, "If any of them touch me, promise to shoot me in the head." In the building, May and Chiang had a sorrowful reunion, praying together and reading the bible. Chiang said that he knew May was coming today because when he read his bible that morning, it stated, "Jehovah made a great thing happen: he made a woman save a man." Three figures emerged from the building: Zhang, May, and Chiang.

What was to become of Zhang? Chiang sternly yelled at Zhang following his release, and he would be sentenced to 50 years of house arrest in both the Mainland and Taiwan. After being

released in 1991 in Taiwan at around age 90, Zhang married, converted to Christianity, and went to live in Hawaii, where he died in 2001 at the age of 100.[8] Zhang is revered by the Communists as a hero and even praised by President Jiang Zemin. Zhang recounted his moments with Chiang, describing him as an egotist, but claimed that their friendship was like "flesh and blood, while their political relationship was like that of sworn enemies.[8]

Chiang never formally agreed to any of Zhang's grievances, but the incident marked a crucial point in Chinese history. Nationalistic fervor following his release did not encourage Communist aggression but rather denounced it. Seemingly, although Chiang had the opportunity to attack a Communist base, he declined to do so.[8] Zhang's yearning for a United China and the expulsion of the Japanese helped Chiang realize that the Japanese were the enemy; to expel the Japanese, the Nationalists and the Communists needed to form a United Front. Without this crucial incident, the Communists may have been entirely suppressed and may have even allowed the Japanese to take over China for an extended time before American aid. Even with American help, China might have either split into multiple factions, been divided into spheres of influence, or been dominated by Chiang. All of these possibilities mark an alternate China.

Conclusion:

War with Japan (1937-1945)

Zhang’s efforts marked a turning point, as with the combined might of the Communist and Nationalist forces, China was able to withstand the Japanese. Between 1937 and 1945, China was engaged in a war with Japan. The Communists proliferated. They took to the countryside, employing guerrilla tactics to deal heavy blows to the exhausted Japanese troops.

The United States compelled the Japanese to relocate their troops from China to the Pacific to counter an even greater threat. Following the bombings on Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan.[27] After a campaign of island hopping, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, ending the war in August 1945.

Chinese Civil War (1945-1949)

The end of the Second Sino-Japanese War did not mark the end of China's conflicts.[28] Peace talks, such as the Marshall Mission, attempted to mediate peace between the two powers. These peace talks failed once the Soviets withdrew from Manchuria in 1946, and the Communists moved in and took control. The Nationalists fought back, even gaining US aid, but to no avail. The Nationalists were pushed back to Formosa, failing because of their incompetent government and the eroding support of their people.

In October 1949, Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China, establishing a new communist government and marking the end of the Chinese Civil War.[28] China was finally at peace after over 38 years, and it would be this government that would drag China out of the impoverished and devastated condition that the colonial powers, the Japanese, and, of course, the warlords had left it in.

Analysis of Warlord Era- Legacy, Impact, and Significance

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive view of the warlord era, while also discussing the importance of the period and its impact on China and the revolution. After reviewing the Anhui, Zhili, and Fengtian cliques, it can be inferred that this was a period of instability. Yet, there is an underlying governance within each of these cliques that contributed to

this instability. As this paper concludes, general trends, important events, and the legacy of the warlords will be assessed.

In all three cliques, these general trends are most evident: their origins from the Beiyang government, the struggle for legitimacy, and dependence on military power to complement political power. All three cliques had leaders who had some connection to the Beiyang government. For example, Duan of the Anhui clique was the minister of war in the Beiyang government and used his role to gather support, creating the Anfu Club, which consisted of Beiyang officials who would create the Anhui clique during the fall of Yuan's unified China. Similarly, Zhang Zuolin of the Fengtian clique was the formal military governor of Manchuria, a title that allowed the Fengtian clique to become autonomous and made Zhang the clear leader. The ties to the old Republicans are important because they greatly contribute to the other two trends: Yuan's militaristic government favored those who were well-versed in military culture, which became an important feature in the warlord period; and because of connections with Yuan and their credentials, warlords claimed their governments to be the legitimate heir to the Beiyang government. Warlords worked together in the Beiyang government, which influenced later alliances and rivalries. For example, before the Anhui-Zhili War, Duan and Zhang were once friendly with each other. They both received support from the Japanese and helped put down internal unrest. It is because of military culture, connections with each other, and the idea of legitimacy that the Warlord period was extremely lethal, mainly because of the recklessness and traditionalism of the warlords.

The struggle for legitimacy was most evident between the Anhui, Zhili, and Kuomintang. The Anhui clique dominated the Beiyang government after Yuan's fall, and Duan had many credentials, such as premier and chief executive. Appalled by Duan's credentials, Zhili officials

like Wu thought that Duan was misusing his power and undermining Chinese sovereignty. The Zhili-Anhui clique started, in part, because of legitimacy. Both cliques believed that they were the heir to the Beiyang government, and they were the protectors of the republic. The Beiyang government still stood in name, and whoever dominated it granted legitimacy to their clique. Warlords wanted legitimacy not only because of nationalistic fervor, but because if the clique is recognized as the true government, it opens opportunities for foreign aid, and the chance that other warlords may succumb to their governments. This all led to increased power to the clique and the warlords leading that clique. The Japanese were actively meddling in Chinese politics and helped empower the Fengtian clique, which overwhelmed the Zhili clique. Warlords sought to gain the support of Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The Kuomintang saw themselves as the rightful heir to the republic because it was founded by Sun Yatsen, known as the father of China. Sun helped spark the revolution in 1911, and by then, he was known globally for his efforts for the revolution. It was he who contributed to the making of the Chinese government and allowed for Yuan to become the first president, and therefore, should be treated as a champion of freedom and democracy. Sun's legacy allowed for the Soviet Union to, at first, aid the Kuomintang. Years later, the Soviet Union and the Kuomintang split because of ideological differences brought on by Chiang, but the Kuomintang was still portrayed as the legitimate China: barbaric and a beacon for freedom. The United States supported Chiang's government even before Pearl Harbor dragged them into the war because of its portrayal. No, Chiang never held a position in the Beiyang government, but it is the legacy of Sun that greatly associated the Kuomintang with freedom and attracted the help of the United States. It is because of the efforts for legitimacy that led to war, but empowered certain groups that came to the top during the Warlord era.

This explanation of the military culture will be brief. Yuan's government was militaristic, and its officials were often of military origin. When Yuan's government fell, power still resided in the hands of these military officials. As a result, when they split, they brought their military culture to rule with an iron fist over the cliques. For example, Cao Kun and Wu Peifu were commanders. They implemented martial law, a move that kept them in power while exalting the military, encouraging citizens to join the effort. The military culture intensified wars with neighboring warlords because not only was that the main way to gain power, but also because that was the way that had been taught to the warlords, who were former military officials. Military culture intensified fighting between cliques, contributing to the lethality of the era.

The major events in this paper include the Zhili-Anhui War, the first and second Fengtian-Zhili wars, and the Huangtun and Mukden incidents. Of the over 200 wars that occurred in this period, these conflicts are among the most important because they laid the foundation for the Second Sino-Japanese War, which was fought mainly in the East, where these wars also happened. The Zhili-Anhui War led to tensions between the Fengtian and Zhili, which then led to Fengtian dominance, only for the Japanese to take over Manchuria. Japan's foothold in Manchuria allowed it to launch an invasion that would influence the fate of China, both in the death toll and the rise of the communists. Although these three cliques have faded into obscurity, their wartime trends and actions greatly impacted China in the late 30s. Above all, the most important event in this paper was not in the warlord era, but right before Yuan's reign. Sun's decision to hand the presidency to Yuan is what made the government unstable, giving way to the vicious men who would later become warlords.

Finally, the legacy of the warlords has been disputed by multiple historians. During and after the period, warlords and their factions were seen as barbaric, and that viewpoint is still

relevant today. As described in the historiography, historians delved deeper than that; it was not the fact that warlords were barbaric that was disputed, but rather what caused them to be that way and if that stereotype should be generalized towards all warlords. As early as the 20s, historians discouraged the public from simply calling the Chinese barbarians, but rather legitimate heirs to the power gap left by the Qing. As the 20th century progressed, historians approached warlordism with an international and factorial view, which would lead to later papers that focused entirely on the social aspect of the period instead of the militaristic aspect. By 2005, multiple viewpoints had been explored, whether it be a big-picture or a global perspective. Studies in the Chinese Warlord period had plunged significantly since the 2000s, when the last significant papers had been published; yet, there has been a revival in studies of this period, demonstrated by a recent paper that focuses on the economic aspect of the warlord period and what that meant for both China and Western nations. Deriving from multiple viewpoints since the 20s, the warlords left a barbaric legacy, but it rose as a result of the absence of the republic. Once there was no government, government officials scurried for power. This does not mean that the warlords were entirely barbaric. Yes, how they achieved their goals often resulted in human rights violations and increased aggression, but all of this was to restore a central government in China, and these plans were not spontaneous; they were planned so that they could take over China. This period was among the most violent in Chinese history, but was also among the most important and overlooked periods because it set up both the Chinese civil war and the Second Sino-Japanese War. It allowed the Kuomintang to get power, and with the onslaught of the Sino-Japanese War, it allowed the communists to take over. If one of these wars had not happened, or even happened at a different time, which would be likely if the Fengtian clique had held their place (delaying the Second Sino-Japanese War), China would not

be where it is today, meaning that Yuan Shikai's fall and the period that followed is pivotal. Ultimately, the warlord period was marked with instability, but proved to be a consequential step into China's development in the latter half of the 20th century and should be treated as a major event rather than an interwar skirmish.

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