

SOCIAL CHANGE AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN WARLORD CHINA

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The death of Yuan Shih-k'ai in 1916 not only established Tuan Ch'i-jiu as the strong man of China, but also climaxed the rise of military men and militarism to the pinnacle of political power. The political fortunes of China, once controlled by civilian bureaucrats of Confucian education were now in the hands of professional soldiers trained either in Chinese military academies at Paoting or Tientsin or in military schools in Japan.¹

Since the intrusion of the West in the early nineteenth century, the Ch'ing dynasty attempted to strengthen its military forces in order to combat these foreign invaders. Later, with the T'ai-p'ing rebellion and such upheavals as the Nien and the Moslem, the imperial court recognized the necessity of granting increased power to men of military skills. The Huai army of Li Hung-chang² and the Hunan forces of Tseng Kuo-fan both attested to the growing importance of militarism in Chinese politics. During the early 1900's, Yuan Shih-k'ai's Newly Created Army³ set the standard for military organization and training that was not to be eclipsed until the advent of the Kuomintang's Whampoa Academy in 1923. Yet, the military skills utilized by Li, Tseng, and Yuan were ones exhibited by civilian men. Indeed, these men were always under the supervision of the imperial court. They were never military men, but civilians who recognized the expediency of military power in times of domestic turmoil. Even Yuan's ascension in 1911 as the most powerful figure in China did not establish the power of militarism over traditional bureaucratism. Indeed, the reliance on his Pei-yang lieutenants to manipulate the Manchus and later the southern revolutionaries provided his proteges with the foundation of political and military power with which to take control in 1916. In fact, the Warlords established a precedent for militarism in China by the impact of the social change that accompanied their takeover of Peking. It gave political significance and new status and recognition to a class of men who were traditionally thought of as lowly and contemptible. With the success of the Northern Expedition and Chiang Kai-shek's triumphant entrance into Peking in 1928,

¹ For a list of Warlords who attended either a Chinese or Japanese military academy, see Jerome Ch'en, "Defining Chinese Warlords and their Factions," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXI (1968), 587, 589-596.

² See Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1964).

³ For a description of the development of the Newly Created Army, see Jerome Ch'en, *Yuan Shih-k'ai* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1972), pp. 30-43.

this new status and recognition began to be accepted by the Chinese people.⁴ However, the status⁵ of military men was not to reach its apogee until the Communist takeover in 1949.

The enormous significance of the political seizure of Peking by the Anhwei militarist, Tuan Ch'i-jui can only be understood within the context of the traditional socio-political hierarchy regarding the professional soldier in China.

Until 1911, the traditional socio-political hierarchy had always precluded military men from completely controlling the political powers of the Chinese government.⁶ Since the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 9), Confucianism was the prevailing ideology that formed the foundation of the Chinese civilization.⁷ The advocates and defenders of this ideology were the intellectuals who served as moralists, government officials or civil servants, and gentry.⁸ Of these three functions, their role as government officials was the most significant. Contrary to the traditional view that the emperor wielded unlimited authority over his ministers, the literati actually controlled the country.⁹ Its power was assured with the establishment of the

⁴ Paul M.A. Linebarger, *Government in Republican China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938), p. 110.

⁵ See also Morton H. Fried, "Military Status in Chinese Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, LVII (January, 1952), 348 who observed that contrary to prevailing views, military status in China was appreciably high and in some periods, higher than the status of the Confucian literati. A rejoinder to Fried was stated by Lee Shu-ching in *Ibid*, 355-357. In this paper, I have followed the traditional view of the military that "Good iron is not beaten into nails, Good men are not made into soldiers".

⁶ Of course, professional soldiers in all stages of interregnum periods in Chinese history were significantly involved in decision-making both politically as well as on the military level. For the importance of the military, especially in Chinese rebellions, see such works as John W. Dardess, "The Transformation of Messianic Revolt and the Founding of the Ming Dynasty," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIX (May, 1970), 539-558; J.B. Parsons, "A Case History of Revolt in the Late Ming," *Oriens Extremus*, III (1956), 81-93; H. Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, XXVI (1954), 82-162; C.K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley: University of California, 1961, 1967), 218-243; Yuri Muramatsu, "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies," in the *Confucian Persuasion*, edited by Arthur Wright (Stanford: Stanford University, 1960), pp. 241-267; Vincent Y.C. Shih, "Some Chinese Rebel Ideologies," *T'oung Pao* XLIV (1956), 150-226; Franz Michael and Chang Chung-li, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1966); Chiang Siang-tseh, *The Nien Rebellion* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1954); Hsiang Ta, et al., *Tai-p'ing Tien kuo* (Shanghai: Shen-chou kuo-kuang she, 1952); Ling Shan-ch'ing, *T'ai Ping-kuo yeh-shih* (Shanghai: Wen-ming shu-chu, 1923); T.T. Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* (Stanford: University, 1953, 1856).

⁷ The most important military dynasty before the advent of Confucianism in the foundation of the Han was the Ch'in dynasty. For a description of its view of the military and the role of Li Ssu, see Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: Li Ssu* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1967, 1938). Cf. James P. Harrison, *The Communists and Chinese Peasant Rebellions: A Study in the Rewriting of Chinese History* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

⁸ Y.C. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West, 1872-1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1966), p. 8.

⁹ See Lee Shu-ching, "Intelligentsia of China," *American Journal of Sociology*, LII (May, 1947), 489-497 for the traditional view. For more on the significance of the literati in the imperial courts, see Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals*, p. 15.

examination system during the T'ang Dynasty (618-906). Indeed, it was this system that provided an effective and convenient source of new recruits of similar mentality and aspirations that could only solidify and perpetuate the elite status of the literati.

The traditional class hierarchy that placed the literati at the apex of the socio-political ladder was based on Mencius' interpretation of the natural inequalities of man.

Some work with their hearts-and-minds, other with their muscles. Those who work with their hearts-and-minds maintain order for others; those who work with their muscles have order maintained by others. Those whose order is maintained by others provide the food; those who maintain order among others receive food. Such is the propriety that is general throughout the world.¹⁰

Since the literati "worked with hearts and minds", its elitist status was sanctioned by tradition. All other groups which relied on physical labour were subordinate. The major factor that determined a person's social status and prestige, therefore, was his occupation.

Constituting a class below the ruling bureaucracy was the "good people"¹¹. This class was composed of the gentry, farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and merchants. Subordinate to the "good people" were the commoners or "cheap people" which consisted of slaves, prostitutes, entertainers, government runners, and bonded servants. Other "cheap people" were beggars, boatmen, and hereditary servants.

In the traditional social structure, men who were militarists by occupation were considered a specific caste within the commoner class. Associated with the "cheap people", the professional soldier was given little status, prestige or esteem. Since the Han period, the traditional Chinese soldier lived a transitory existence. Situated mainly along the borderlands, the soldier lived apart from the "good people" in military-agricultural settlements during times of peace. In the fifth century, these settlements were frequently referred to as camps because the professional soldier and his family were now called "camp families". By the Ming period (1368-1644), many non-Chinese soldiers were conscripted into these camps, especially in

¹⁰ Mencius, *The Saying of Mencius*, trans. by James R. Ware (New York: New American, 1960), p. 55.

¹¹ The classification of certain types of social groups appear to be lacking in universal acceptance among scholars concerned with China's social stratification. Some authors have referred to the "good people" as the commoners, while others have called the commoners the "cheap people". See Ch'u Tung-tsu, *Chung-kuo fa-lu yu chung kwo she* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937), pp. 230-248; Ch'u Tung-tsu, *Han Social Structure*, edited by Jack L. Dull (Seattle: University of Washington, 1972), pp. 3-247; Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: Columbia University, 1962), p. 18. Ho also called the "cheap people" the "declassed" or degraded people because they were disenfranchised (although their descendants were enfranchised) and numerically insignificant. For the purpose of this study of the traditional Chinese social structure, I have used Wolfram Eberhard's societal class classification and definitions. See his *Social Mobility in Traditional China* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962), pp. 15-18.

southwestern China.¹² The inclusion of "barbarians" into China's armed forces reinforced the prevailing negative image of the professional soldier in the minds of the ethnocentric "good people".

Soldiers were, of course, necessary to defend the populace against bandits in and around villages and cities. Like their border counterparts, these soldiers were considered "cheap people" by the surrounding populace. In fact, soldiers were generally thought of as simply uniformed bandits in the pay of the government. The "good people", especially the farmers, therefore, desired little or no contact with them.¹³

A second soldier class was also present in traditional China. These were the militia soldiers who served without choice, but rather by government regulation. Since they did not select the military as an occupation, and were, for the most part, farmers who were compelled to serve in the army as part of their labour obligations, they were not considered a segment of the commoner class once in uniform, but retained their status as members of the "good people" class.

A third type of military men were the imperial guards of the court. Since they had special status as bodyguards of the imperial family, these men were considered part of the "good people" class, rather than included with beggars, government runners, and bonded servants.¹⁴ The status of the professional soldier, therefore, was essentially low in traditional China. The prevailing view that war was evil or at best, a painful necessity reinforced the fortunes of the Confucian bureaucrats and civilian rule.

The actual allocation of the military to a declassed status in Confucian China can reasonably be traced to the Confucian bureaucrats themselves.¹⁵

¹² Eberhard, *Social Mobility*, pp. 19-20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Since the beginning of Chinese dynastic history, the official status of military men and institutions had not always been immutable. Unlike the constant role of the military which had remained primarily one of expansion, consolidation and/or protection, military status had fluctuated from pre-eminence during the Shang, Chou, and Ch'in periods to degradation following the advent of the Western Han and its Confucian-based government. Since this distinct change in military status was concomitant with the establishment of a government administered by Confucian bureaucrats, was Mencius' maxim of the natural inequalities of man now a source of truth? After all, military men utilized their "muscles" while Confucian bureaucrats "worked with their hearts and minds". Indeed, Confucianism urged a predominance of age over youth which, in turn, meant a propensity for wisdom over the barbarism of military activity. Moreover, Confucianists exalted learning and education over courage and military skills. [Joseph R. Levenson and Franz Shurmann, *China, An Interpretive History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971, 1969), pp. 53, 74.] War was, in effect, a youthful institution while governmental policy-making was for the experienced and sagacious elders. The philosophy of Confucianism, therefore, did not esteem the military. On the other hand, it did not specifically advocate the degeneration of the military to a declassed status as it was officially to be assigned during the Western Han period. Even Confucius himself never called for a debasement of the professional soldier or his institutions. When asked by Tzu Kung about the good features of government, Confucius replied that the requisites were "sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the people." [Confucius, *Analects*, trans. by Arthur Waley (New York: Vintage, n.d., 1938), p. 164, Book XII, #7.] The military, therefore, played an important part in Confucius' govern-

Being men who exalted history and looked to the past as a didactic source of reasoning and action in the present, they not only envisioned a specific period (the Golden Age of Yao and Shun) as the manifestation of an ideal Chinese society, but also recognized that other less idyllic, more tyrannical and barbarous dynasties were sad features of Chinese history. One such dynasty was the Ch'in (221-207 B.C.).

The epilogue to the Ch'in drama was barely more than five years when Han history began. Thus, the lessons of that tragic age were still fresh in the memories of those Confucianists who had survived the brutality of Li Ssu's absolutist government. The "remembrance of things past" included a state presided over by that megalomaniac, Shih Huang-ti who followed the way of the true Legalist ruler by allowing his ministers to rule; a military system based on universal conscription that not only proved to be the foundation of Ch'in autocracy, but also the best drilled, most efficient, and highly utilized in Chinese history;¹⁶ and finally, what ensued as the most vivid recollections—the burning of the Classics in 213 B.C. and the burial of 460 Confucian peers in 212 B.C.

The events of those years were aimed at consolidating the state orthodoxy at the expense of destroying history and eradicating the objectionable and non-conformist "hundred schools of thought". Although Li Ssu's recommendations were met with some success since certain areas of Chinese history remain either obscured or moribund the lasting result of his tyranny earned his emperor the enduring detestation of all succeeding generations of Confucian scholars.¹⁷ In the Western Han, the Confucian scholars viewed Li Ssu's actions perhaps with more vehemence because of their historical intimacy with the events. Their response, however, was not merely a mental castigation of government by tyranny and fear, but a direct abhorrence of the instruments of tyranny and fear. Their vilification of the military instruments of political power, therefore, was a natural outgrowth of men sensitive to human ethics and learning (personified in Confucianism) as the basis of good government and human interaction. In fact, the essence of literati existence precluded "men of power (physical, martial power, even without

ment. When asked about military conflicts, Confucius suggested that "the ordering of ritual vessels, I have some knowledge, but warfare is a thing I have never studied." [Confucius, *Analects*, p. 193, Book XV, #1.] Thus, Confucius neither esteemed nor defiled the military. On the other hand, Mencius was more explicit about a military ruler. He stated that "he who uses force in place of virtue is a *pa* (military lord). He who is virtuous and practise human heartedness is a *wang* (sage king)." [Mencius, cited in Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, edited and trans. by Derk Bodde (New York: MacMillan, 1964), p. 74, Book IIa, #3.] But even this Confucian leader did not relegate the military to the lowest strata of society. Philosophical Confucianism, therefore, did not suggest a debasement of the military to a class usually restricted to entertainers, slaves, prostitutes, government runners, beggars, boatmen, and permanent servants.

¹⁶ Bodde, *China's First Unifier*, p. 7.

¹⁷ C.P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Short Cultural History* (New York: Praeger, 1961, 1935), p. 130.

concomitant political power).¹⁸ It was efficacious then to reduce the power and status of the military as a means of curtailing Confucian fear of armed power usually associated with professional military men. Moreover, a politically impotent military could never compete with the bureaucracy for governmental supremacy. Yet, to completely destroy the power role of the military would inevitably invite disaster from peripheral groups along the frontier hinterlands. Thus, a careful balancing of the strengths of the military was needed. Indeed, the armed forces must still protect, expand (but at the discretion of the civilian bureaucracy), and consolidate (again, at bureaucratic direction). However, it must never compete with the Confucian bureaucrats for political power.

In any society, the role of an occupation is significant only if its status is sufficiently of high prestige and esteem. The manipulators of status and, thus the architects of providing repulsive or attractive features to a certain vocation are the administrators of governmental activity. In Han times, the status manipulators were the Confucian bureaucrats. They possessed the instrument of occupational esteem or debasement. They could, indeed render status. In this way, the necessary fluidity of new recruits essential to any viable group would be restricted, if not destroyed. In the case of professional military men whom the Confucian bureaucrats needed as protectors of civilian power, the literati lowered the occupational status of the soldier caste to that of a degraded and despised class. Thus, it was hope that the most able members of society would be repelled by the idea of class association with slaves and beggars. An ambitious and talented young man would, therefore, avoid such an unrespectable class because it would undoubtedly mean an undesirable stigma attached to his family and to himself. In turn, he might seek upward mobility through the usual channels of the examination system. The altering of the status of the military, therefore, would not only serve to discourage men with ability from following a martial career, but also, conversely, to encourage them to enter the scholar-gentry class, thus providing viability in the Confucian bureaucracy.

The altering of the status of military men proved to be crucial in terms of social and political mobility and power from the Western Han period to 1911. The stigma of debasement attached to the professional soldier did much to discourage men who sought respectability and legitimacy in vocational choice from entering military service. Men who were already considered debased in class, however, regarded the military neither with enmity nor abhorrence. In fact, for these men on the fringe of society, the alteration of military status did nothing to discourage talented beggars (especially Chu Yuan-cheng, the founder of the Ming Dynasty), from entering the military as the eventual avenue to the seizure of political power. Thus the relegation of military status to degradation that began as a response to Ch'in

¹⁸ Levenson, *China, An Interpretive History*, p. 80.

tyranny still offered socio-political mobility. This type of advancement, however, was only viable in times of such domestic distress as rebellions or economic calamities.

The event that brought forth a new thinking in the minds of the "good people" class towards the military was the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Although military modernization had begun after the Tai'ping rebellion, and was accelerated in 1895 after China's defeat in the war with Japan, military status was still considered traditional. The impact of the Russo-Japanese War, however, produced profound psychological implications. After years of western penetration, such a victory by an Asian country provided a stimulus to the latent patriotism and nationalism that was apparent by 1903.¹⁹ A sense of Asian nationalism arose in the minds of the Chinese whose pride in their "brothers" achievement clouded, for a moment, past Japanese aggrandizement in China. Utilizing the Japanese example, Chinese reformers were convinced that the most effective way to rid China of the Western imperialists was through military means. The emphasis on the reorganization and creation of an effective standing army that might duplicate the incredible Japanese feat was paramount in the reform efforts of the imperial court. With imperial sanction and encouragement, the status of military men rose accordingly.

A further encouragement that increased the social and occupational prestige of the soldier class was the emphasis on military academies. One of the prime weaknesses in the traditional military forces was their lack of a modern trained officer corps that could deal effectively with the modern armies of European and Japan. Of the first military academies that helped to alleviate this shortage were those established at Paoting and Tientsin, but the demand for well qualified men was still critical. After an intensive study of the military needs of China, the Commission for Army Reorganization suggested to the throne that military schools be created throughout the nation. In September, 1904, the imperial court endorsed this proposal. Thus, with the throne recognizing the necessity of widespread military schools, coupled with China's traditional emphasis on education, military service was becoming a respectable occupation.

The imperial recognition of the necessity of militarism was followed by the abolition of the traditional examination system in 1905. With the traditional avenue of political power effectively closed, many members of the gentry class who previously would have looked to military through the scholar-official class now looked to military service for upward mobility. Many sons of the gentry, in effect, were attracted by the expanding prestige and influence of military academies.²⁰ Their acknowledgment of the military as a respectable occupation not only enhanced the status of the soldier

¹⁹ Ralph L. Powell, *The Rise of Chinese Military Power, 1895-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1955), p. 163.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

class, but also produced a totally new class in China — the military-gentry, similar in background to the German Junkers.

The prestige of the military increased further in 1911 when the Manchu government recognized the desirability of eliciting the aid of Yuan Shih-k'ai and his military machine to quell revolts in central and south China. For the Manchus, militarism was indispensable for the maintenance of their deteriorating empire. The Confucian bureaucrats who formed the traditional foundation of political power were now moribund. They could no longer prevent the formation of a military bloc capable of assuming power. On the other hand, they were unable to create and maintain a new military foundation that would support their political existence. Indeed, in their desperate attempts to save the vestiges of their declining power and position, their reforming zeal provided the conditions for the rise of modern Chinese militarism. But, the milieu offered no other alternative. The Confucian bureaucrats, therefore, were compelled to adopt an accommodating attitude towards the military. In 1911, this attitude turned to deference, and all their efforts to strengthen the dying empire were futile.

Any notions suggesting that the state of the Confucian bureaucrats resembled the conditions of their ancestors during past dynastic upheavals were quickly dispelled with the introduction of a new republican philosophy of government in 1912. Any vestigial powers or influences that remained after 1912 were obliterated in 1916 when the Warlords seized control. Although the monarchical attempts by Yuan Shih-k'ai in 1915 and Chang Hsun in 1917 furnished new hope for a revival of Confucian bureaucratic existence, the foundation of these anachronistic restorations were predicated on militarism. The hopes of the Confucian bureaucrats and such Confucian societies as the *K'ung-she* in Chihli and Honan appeared to be incongruous. At best, it represented a final attempt to reassert the basis of a lost civilization.

The ascension of military men to the position of political supremacy drastically altered the traditional socio-political hierarchical system. By 1911 with the rise of Yuan Shih-k'ai supported by his Pei-yang military lieutenants, and especially in 1911 with the seizure of power by the Warlord, Tuan Ch'i-jui, there was no doubt that military men were the political elites of China. The Confucian bureaucrats, therefore, became increasingly apprehensive about their status in Chinese society. No longer effective as a power group because their tradition and temperament as scholars provided little training in a political arena founded on force and violence, the Confucian bureaucrats had no other recourse but to withdraw from political life, and pursue private interests.²¹ The fact that they now constituted an obsolete class without any means of influencing a society that had previously paid political deference to them isolated the traditional literati from the main-

²¹ Lucian W. Pye, *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 155-156.

stream of political activity. Their sense of powerlessness, coupled with the inability to reconcile their civilian and scholarly personalities with the military norm alienated the literati from contemporary Chinese society.

Although many Confucian bureaucrats divorced themselves from the existing political milieu, a few accepted administrative posts in Warlord governments. The fact that the Confucian bureaucrats were still recognized suggested that the Warlords were prepared to accord some deference to tradition as exemplified by the bureaucrats. By acknowledging the existence of these men, the militarists, moreover, were able to exploit the lingering prestige of this scholarly class. Because the positions allocated to the bureaucrats were politically sterile, providing them with nothing more than puppet status, the public's respect for these men rapidly disintegrated.²²

The socio-military change that shook the foundation of China's traditional social strata provided the Warlords with new status and recognition. Military service became increasingly attractive for ambitious men, and the fact that the ensuing chaos provided rapid upward mobility established it as the easiest and most accessible road to achieve political prominence.²³ But, because militarism constituted an upheaval of the traditional ideology and social strata, the Warlords were forced to seek some form of legitimacy to base their status as the new political elite of China. The foundation of legitimacy that the Warlords cultivated was Confucianism—not the defunct ideology advocated by the Confucian bureaucrats, but a popularized interpretation of the ethics of the venerable sages. Indeed, the Warlords appeared to look to the distant past for a vindication of their military existence. The irony was obvious. The Confucian bureaucrats, in their support of one dynasty over another, also looked to history for a justification of their civilian existence.

The attempt by the Warlords to elicit some framework to legitimize their military regimes can be said to be based on "traditionalist authority"²⁴ because they looked to history, especially the ancient Classics, the ethics of the sages, and the socio-political significance of the primacy of *the people* propounded by Mencius. Since Confucianism had always been the most influential philosophy in the familial-social and bureaucratic-political

²² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²³ Chow Yung-teh, *Social Mobility in China* (New York: Atherton, 1966), p. 157.

²⁴ This type of authority was conceived by Max Weber whose definition of traditionalism as the basis of legitimization best suits the Warlords in their attempt to find some form of legitimacy for their military regimes. Essentially, traditionalism for Weber is the "authority of the 'eternal yesterday' i.e. of the mores sanctioned through the unimaginably ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform." [Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited and trans. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University, 1958), pp. 78f.] Included in this concept is traditionalist authority which Weber described as control based "upon the psychical attitude-set for the habitual workaday and to the belief in the everyday routine as an inviolable norm of conduct." [*Ibid.*, p. 296.] Thus, legitimization based on traditionalism looked to sanctions of history, to what had been recognized as being viable in another age.

life of China, it was a ready tool that could be used for the political ends of the Warlords. Although such philosophical and ideological frameworks as the pragmatism of John Dewey and the Communism of Marx and Lenin as well as the Liberalism of J.S. Mill were available, they were not utilized because Confucianism was still regarded with much reverence by the Warlords. Indeed, many northern Warlords, especially Tuan Ch'i-jui and Wu Pei-fu as well as the southern Warlord, Ch'en Chiung-ming not only esteemed the Confucian intellectuals, but also attempted to identify with them by practising calligraphy and brush painting, writing classical poetry, or even studying Buddhism.²⁵ A few Confucian bureaucrats, moreover, were employed by the Warlords as political administrators in their governments. The fact that their power was nominal illustrated that the Warlords may have viewed them only as symbolic representatives of the traditional society. Perhaps, by paying deference to these men, the Warlords sought to provide a semblance of traditional sanctity to their military governments.

During the initial years of the Warlord era, several Warlords sought to elevate Confucianism to the status of a state religion. Although conservatives and monarchists²⁶ as far back as 1905, and even Yuan Shih-k'ai in 1913 had called for the establishment of Confucianism as a state religion, the fact that such Warlords as Chang Hsun who was deemed the "military sage",²⁷ Ts'ao K'un, and Ni Hsu-chang all desired governmental recognition of Confucianism as the religion of China²⁸ illustrated that these militarists were willing to pay deference to tradition.

Although the Warlords were militarists and by their taking over the government therefore, debasers of a traditional ideology and governmental system founded upon the concept of non-militaristic bureaucratic elite of Confucian scholars as the legitimate agents of the traditional Chinese polity, they were no less rigid defenders of the Confucian tradition. However, unlike the traditional scholars whose class members learned the tenets of Confucianism by rigorous and repetitious study of the ancient Classics, the Warlords became acquainted with Confucianism "not from the classics and sutras but from

²⁵ Winston Hsieh, "The Ideas and Ideals of a Warlord, Ch'en Chiung-ming (1878-1933)," Vol. XVI *Papers on China* (Cambridge: Harvard University), p. 240. For a list of Warlords who possessed traditional degrees, see Ch'en, "Defining Chinese Warlords," 589. For studies describing the humble origins of Warlords, see Chang Chun-ku, *Wu Pei-fu ch'u'an* (Taipei: Chuan-chi wen hsueh tsa chih she, 1968), Vols. I & II; Ch'ih Sung-tzu, *Min-kuo ch'un-ch'iu* (Hong Kong: Haitien wen-hua fu-wu she, 1961); T'ao Chu-yin, *Pei-yang chun-fa t'ung-chih shih-ch'i shih-hua* (Peking: San lien shu tien, 1958); Sonada Kazukki, *Hsin Chung-kuo jen-wu chih* (Shanghai: Liang-yu, 1930); James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1966, 1970).

²⁶ See Joseph R. Levenson, *The Problem of Monarchical Decay* (Vol. II of *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, 3 Vols.; Berkeley: University of California, 1968), p. 14. See also Chow Tse-tsung, "The Anti-Confucian Movement in Early Republican China," in the *Confucian Persuasion*, pp. 291, 296-297.

²⁷ *North China Herald*, February 11, 1917, p. 304.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1917, p. 444.

popular novels, operas, story-telling, and so on.”²⁹ Warlord Confucianism can thus be termed popular Confucianism as opposed to the institutional Confucianism practised by the traditional imperial bureaucrats. Indeed, because the Warlords were generally lacking in the understanding of modern political thought, they were unable to utilize any other political or ethical foundation other than their rudimentary knowledge of Confucianism³⁰ to determine the quality of the thought and behaviour of others. Popular Confucianism to these Warlords was the “only yardstick of legitimacy and legitimacy meant respectability.”³¹ Once a Warlord assumed political authority over the national capital at Peking, he inevitably attempted to demonstrate to others that he was indeed a practitioner of the Confucian ideology primarily by his verbal utterances. To manifest his Confucianism, therefore, would legitimize his claim to political power. The Warlords, however, always “took the moral ground of his own action for granted while applying Confucian yardstick only to credit his friends or discredit his foes.”³²

The extent to which Warlords venerated the Confucian ethics and the Classics can be seen in their speeches, telegrams, letters, and presidential mandates. References were liberally made to such ethical concepts as *jen* and *li*, the Classics, and *the people* as the basis of Chinese civilization. Tuan Ch'i-jui, for example, in his denunciation of Ts'ao K'un's government in 1924 pointed to ethical concepts and the Classics to support his contentions. For Tuan:

. . . Peking has been a dunghill. The Central government has been a medium of corruption and bribery. They care neither about our nation nor about our people. They know not the meaning of politeness and righteousness, integrity, and shame. . . . Sycophants are ruining the government. . . . For the sake of ones own exaltation and glory, crimes offensive to Heaven are being perpetuated.

Now that “the downtrodden when pressed to the extreme point will rise again”, is taught in the *Book of Changes*. “To punish the guilty and rescue the people” is a principle expounded in the *Book of Spring and Autumn*. . . . Let us rise at once, just as Liu Kun and Fan Pang did in ancient times, to save our people from destruction from water and fire.³³

The significance of *the people* in Confucianism was fully explicated by Mencius in his reply to Wan Chang when the latter asked whether Yao actually gave his kingdom to Shun.

. . . Of old, Yao presented Shun to Sky [Heaven] and Sky accepted him: Shun was revealed to the subjects and the subjects accepted him. . . . Sky sees as my subjects sees. Sky hears as my subjects hears.³⁴

²⁹ Ch'en, “Defining Chinese Warlords,” 569.

³⁰ See note #25.

³¹ Ch'en, “Defining Chinese Warlords,” 572.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Tuan Ch'i-jui, *North China Herald*, September 20, 1918, pp. 674-675.

³⁴ Mencius, *Sayings*, pp. 118-119.

Thus, an empire or government's final and true legitimacy rested in the hands of *the people*.

During the Warlord era, militarists frequently attempted to demonstrate that their proposed actions were in the name of *the people*. By stating that such deeds were sanctioned by *the people*, a sense of traditional legality would, therefore, be established. An example of a militarist's deference to *the people* can be seen in Chang Tso-lin's statement before his war with Wu P'ei-fu in 1924.

. . . Ts'ao K'un and Wu P'ei-fu with their minds perverted are more than ever bent upon showing their ferocious fangs. . . . The wicked deeds done by Ts'ao and Wu have accumulated mountain high, too numerous to count. To mention a few of their principle crimes, I shall point out the bribing of the M.P.'s in order to steal the highest position; the keeping of the "paws and teeth" in order to crush the neighbouring provinces; Peking destroys what the people hope to set up, namely the self-government system; Peking tramples what the whole nation is praying to secure, viz: peace.

Since public opinion is unanimously opposed to the continuation of such wicked regime, I, Tso-lin for the sake of our nation and our people feel it my bounden duty to lead my army and swear to rid the country of the people's traitors. . . .³⁵

Although the Warlords sought to legitimize their military regimes, these institutions may not have existed if the militarists were unable to establish loyalty between themselves and their military lieutenants and proteges. Based on "personalism" this loyalty can be defined as the manifestation of interaction between leaders and subordinates in which personalities, likes, and dislikes, rather than ability, talent, intelligence, or formal education dictated the extent of a man's loyalty to his officers. Warlord loyalty can best be described as a teacher-student relationship that included a high degree of reciprocity. The Warlord, as patron was obliged to support, and sometimes further the interests of his proteges who, in turn, were expected to support their leader in the same manner as a student was obligated to support his teacher.³⁶

The use of teacher-student relationship resulted in a loyal group of military proteges whom the Warlord had personally trained. Forming the basis of a Warlord's power, these men were his military vanguard. However, because a protege was personally loyal to his patron and followed his political and military endeavours, his own political and military fortunes were concomitant with that of his patron.

The Warlords' loyalty based on personalism prevailed throughout the early years of the Warlord era. After 1920, however, several militarists began to consider such impersonal factors as specialized skills and training in warfare in their assessment of individual subordinates. Chang Tso-lin, for example,

³⁵ Chang Tso-lin, *North China Herald*, September 13, 1924, p. 405.

³⁶ Pye, *Warlords Politics*, pp. 49-51. See also Ch'en, "Defining Chinese Warlords," 596-599 for the relationships among the various Warlords.

was forced to rely on a new group of subordinates who possessed modernized skills and training because of his growing power in Manchuria and Peking.³⁷ This group which consisted of such militarists as Kuo Sung-lin, Wu Chin, and Chang Teng-hsuan gradually replaced such personal, bandit followers as Yang Yu-ting, Kao Ching-ho, Wang Yung-chiang, and Chang Hsuan-hsiang as the Mukden Warlord's military vanguard.

As the Warlord era disintegrated into military conflicts, other personal considerations such as money also influenced Warlord loyalty. Indeed, tactics such as the use of "silver bullets" (or the inducement of silver, or other cash payments) resulted in many defections.³⁸ Since treachery was widespread only during this period, it has been assumed that the entire Warlord era was infested with traitors, and personal loyalty was completely extinguished. The emphasis on the financial factor as the major cause of defection has, indeed, created a picture that all Warlords were opportunistic and avaricious, and that a Warlord's inability to pay subordinates would inevitably end in his demise. This image of a Warlord, however, was not true in the case of the troops of Wu Pei-fu and Feng Yu-hsiang. In 1924 and 1926, the Chihli and Kuominchun forces had not been paid for over nine months. Yet, this fact did not deter them from remaining loyal to their Warlord commanders.³⁹ In some cases, therefore, loyalty based on personalism was still effective. Thus, it can be stated that even though personal loyalty was losing its force, it was not altogether dead. Indeed, the stress on treachery as a major feature of the Warlord era has been overstated, especially in view of the fact that there never developed an open market for mercenary officers who could sell out to the highest bidder.⁴⁰

Although the Warlords' Confucianism was a popularized rather than a profound, analytical, or exhaustive interpretation of the ancient Classics, the relationship between Warlord and protege before 1920, and even during the years of conflict when loyalties wavered and other factors played a significant role in the loyalty patterns, was based on the subjective and personal qualities of a man's worth. This still reflected the humanistic approach to Confucianism. Yet the Confucianism of the early Republic was one without vitality. The coming of the West, the ramifications of the T'ai-p'ing, the reform movements, the educational and governmental changes and finally the trauma of the 1911 Revolution rendered Confucianism anachronistic in a society that by 1916 had provided new avenues of socio-political mobility for classes that were traditionally inferior. Now, not only could men of military background acquire personal wealth and political power, but the influx of new thought, especially Marxism offered new hope and new alternatives of social and political changes that might bring about a stable

³⁷ Pye, *Warlord Politics*, pp. 49-51.

³⁸ Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord*, p. 21.

³⁹ Pye, *Warlord Politics*, pp. 49-51. See also *North China Herald*, May 27, 1922.

⁴⁰ Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord*, pp. 21-22.

China. The rise of the new labour and merchant classes provided new opportunities for ambitious men who desired to remain outside of the political arena. All of these modern developments occurred during the Warlord period. Although the Warlords may not have encouraged their rise, they did, nevertheless, provide the socio-political milieu for their advancement. The new intellectual, labour, and merchant classes, therefore, were able to mature without the restrictions of the old Confucian order. Indeed, the Warlords' drive to power brought forth a pluralistic society in which even the personal nature of man's relationship with his fellow man eventually crumbled under the encroachment of impersonal technology. Yet, this pluralistic society would also mean the demise of the monolithic order that personified the purely militaristic regimes of the Warlords. Thus, the Warlords, in their pre-occupation with power founded upon force and violence unwittingly destroyed the very society and ethics that they attempted to utilize as their basis of legitimization. But then, how could a military man use a political framework devised and refined by a civilian elite for a civilian elite and that despised and degraded the professional soldier? The fact that these militarists sought legitimacy in a moribund, civilian based political ethic could only mean its complete destruction once the Warlords assumed power in 1916. Indeed, the use of this obsolete framework of legitimization that could work solely for a civilian elite would, in the end, lead only to failure for military-oriented men as the Chinese Warlord. The Warlords, moreover, in their destruction of the old, civilian order and the establishment of a new, open society provided the rudimentary foundation of formidable challenges to their supremacy. Indeed, they provided the political environment in which Nationalism and Communism could develop and intensify. After all, the Warlords backed by foreign giants were ready prey to the propaganda tactics of the student and intellectual nationalists and Communists — two dynamic groups whose sentiments when united finally created the viable substance for a unified China.