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THE CHINESE WAR-LORD SYSTEM OF THE 1920s ITS ORIGIN AND TRANSFORMATIONS

The author has analyzed the war-lord system of early 1920s as a link between the old imperial order and period of Kuomintang rule with subsequent revolutionary change. He has discussed economic, social and political role of various military formations, political and cultural background of the war-lord system and the opinions on military rule expressed in the Komintern which were the first attempt to introduce the Marxist methodology to this problem. Different forms of evolution of the military rule has been also discussed.

As a result of the revolution of 1911, the real power in the provinces was taken over by local military commanders. China broke up into practically autonomous areas of local war-lords who had at their disposal armies of various size and, consequently, exercised control over larger or smaller territories. The war-lords most frequently joined together in relatively durable groupings that waged wars among themselves aimed at increasing their possessions, entered into short-lived alliances, broke up and were reconstructed again. Areas separated from the rest of the territory by major natural obstacles, like e.g. the provinces of Shansi and Szechwan or the Chinese Turkestan, were controlled by one or several competing war-lords and maintained a considerable degree of neutrality with regard to the wars in the central regions.

A general who belonged to a grouping retained full autonomy. He could leave the grouping at any moment and join another clique or start the struggle for the establishment of his own grouping. The general — leader of a clique performed within it the functions of co-ordination and mediation; outside it, he fought

for its interests in the relations with other cliques and with foreign countries. The policy of a clique was co-ordinated at periodical meetings of the generals. Usually once a year, there took place a broad congress of generals and marshals of the different groupings. It had the character of a dinner party held in strict privacy, in a private estate. At the meetings, alliances for the following year were formed, problems of relations with foreign countries were discussed and information was exchanged. At this peculiar generals' exchange, a commander who had lost his army could obtain — in the form of comradely mutual assistance — aid in money and arms so as to regain his position.

The war-lord cliques for the most part recognized formally the supremacy of the Peking government which was the official representative of the Republic of China on the international scene. It frequently happened, however, that one or more cliques refused even formal recognition of Peking and formed a separatist or rival government. The Peking government was of a puppet character, it was usually set up by the clique ruling in the capital province, in league with its current allies. The various cliques had connections with various Powers whose interests they defended, receiving from them certain political and military assistance in return. Changes of alliances and changes of patrons were of common occurrence at all levels; sometimes, the entire clique would sever its connections with one Power and establish contact with another, a general would change patrons, it also happened that troops would leave their general and pass to another, later to return to the former commander — or to begin an independent existence and become the germ of a new grouping.

Apart from military groupings with a legal status, making part of the official political structure, and whose authority in the given area was legalized one way or another, there existed numerous robber bands, the so-called *tu-fey*. They sometimes exercised control over vast territories, collecting taxes and imposing tributes on merchants and businessmen. Unlike the war-lords' armies that controlled urban centres and wielded power from there, the robber bands usually had their abodes in the mountains, on islands, etc., and even penetrated into minor towns. The dividing line between war-lord troops and robber bands was vague.

As its influence grew, a robber band, after seizing an urban centre, could obtain legal status, and its leader — the rank of a general. The contrary could also happen: soldiers from a routed army or a group of deserters could form a robber band, thus passing from legal to illegal status. These bands were sometimes a considerable political force and had to be reckoned with in the appraisal of the military situation. Armed units originating from robber bands frequently had even greater military value than regular troops.¹ The basic source of maintenance for both the former and the latter were taxes raised from the population, above all from peasants. They made the income of the commanders, they were used for purchases of arms and munitions, for the recruitment of troops, for major purchases, e.g. of uniforms, and occasionally for the soldiers' pay. The enlisted men and junior officers often lived largely by robbery, plunder and semi-legal requisitions. Naturally, this robbery played a greater role in the economy of the robber bands.

In the 1920s, there were also in China many armed troops maintained by private persons and by corporations. Villages quite often had their own troops intended for defence and for the maintenance of public order. The functions of the rural militia as well as its character varied, depending on the local conditions: on whether the village was inhabited by land-owning peasants or chiefly by tenants of local big land-owners. If it served mainly the public needs as a body enforcing law and order, then it usually had the character of a militia and peasants living by productive work were on duty by turns. If, on the other hand, it served the local big land-owners by making it possible for them to maintain order and to collect tributes from destitute peasants, then it was as a rule

¹ E.g. the press organ of the Chinese Communist Party — *Siangtao* [*The Guide Weekly*], analyzing the military situation in the province of Henan, enumerated the military groupings active there, including the robbers. Out of 6 groupings cited by name, close to the Kuomintang and in which the forces of the Left could find support, 4 were qualified as robber bands (Xiangdao, No. 167, 19 October 1926, p. 1825). A. V. Blagodatov, analyzing the military groupings of the Shantung war-lords, states that out of six corps of greatest combat value, three traced their origin to robber bands. (A. V. Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitajskoj revoljucii 1925 - 1927*, Moskva 1970, p. 220).

a professional or semi-professional force, made up of household servants and of other people dependent on the big land-owner family. Such a squad was sometimes of a clearly private character and was kept up entirely by the land-owner. It happened that the functions of the land-owner's squad were performed by the local robber band forcing the peasants into submission. Clans or corporations, e.g. merchants' guilds, could maintain their own armed troops. Corporation troops sometimes grew to become a considerable force. Thus e.g. the units of so-called "paper tigers," numbering more than ten thousand men and maintained by the merchants' guild of Canton, constituted for quite some time a serious threat to Sun Yat-sen's government and it was not until they had been routed that the Kuomintang gained real power in the Canton region. Militia troops formed by trade unions played an important role in the revolutionary events in towns, and peasant militia troops — in the countryside. The character of rural militia units sometimes came close to that of robber bands, in particular when the former were private or corporation forces. In keeping with a tradition of many centuries, and with the right of the population — recognized by the State — to form their own local armed forces, the militia units had a legal status. Many a time in the history of China, the State outright inspired and organized popular troops of that kind; such was the case e.g. at the time of the 1911 revolution and immediately afterwards. Thus many of the troops functioning in the 1920s under the leadership of the local gentry had been formed on the strength of edicts issued by the central revolutionary government or by provincial authorities.

A peculiar type of corporation forces were troops formed by secret societies. They operated in big cities and on trade and contraband routes and became a sort of gangster service; in small-town regions, their character was similar to that of corporation forces, in rural areas — to that of militia. In periods of public unrest, they became a form of mass organization of the peasant and small-town population standing up against the local administration and its armed forces or against foreign troops that arrived to the given area. Those insurgent troops were sometimes able to rout or to paralyze effectively the war-lord forces.

Such was the case in 1926 in the province of Henan when the units of "Red Lances" routed the 2nd National Army which made part of the Feng Yü-hsiang grouping. The troops of secret societies seldom obtained legal status, they were at most tolerated and, in case of disturbances, they were fought outright by the administration and its forces. The military units of the war-lords were as a rule strictly connected with a specific area. Both enlisted men and officers came from the same province and they usually strove to gain control over the territory of their origin. Localism was even much stronger in popular formations, closely connected with a specific village, commune, small town or region.

Outwardly, it might seem that the fall of the civilian imperial rule, of the old Confucianist order, the taking-over of power in the provinces by the military, and the establishment of a new de-centralized political structure, was something very unusual, a turning point in the history of China. There were undoubtedly many new elements in the situation in the 1920s. China became a part of the capitalist world market and was undergoing fundamental economic and social transformations. Yet processes in many respects similar had already taken place many a time previously.

Characteristic of the Chinese type of feudalism were economic and social crises recurring with great regularity, usually resulting in the fall of the ruling dynasty, a disorganization of the centralized system of state administration, and a virtual disintegration of the country into minor social and political organisms. The crisis of the dynasty usually brought about an increase of the importance of local leaders with their own armed forces at their disposal. Disintegration was accompanied by great peasant mutinies or by invasions of foreign armies that took advantage of China's internal weakness. The man to found the new dynasty was usually the army commander who had managed to subordinate a certain number of local leaders, to win the necessary support or to gain obedience by force; it was sometimes the commander of the insurgent peasant army or a general of governments army, sometimes the commander of a foreign invading army. Only later, he would gradually rebuild the centralized administration apparatus and restore the civilian character of state authority, breaking down the resistance of local leaders and subordinating them more and

more to himself. Obviously, the various dynastic crises differed considerably, and the political crisis after the revolution of 1911 was of a different character altogether: it was brought about not only by internal processes but by the impact of external factors as well, by the increasing semicolonial exploitation of China. However, the disintegration of the country into regions controlled by local disposers of armed forces who performed administrative functions, was typical of China; it was conditioned by the character of the still prevailing economic and social relations. The only thing was that the economic and social processes taking place in the period of disintegration were already quite different as was also the final result: China embarked on the road of industrialization and of development of state capitalism — and not on the road of rebuilding feudalism of a bureaucratic type.

Disintegration was intensified and consolidated by foreign interference, by the virtual division of China into spheres of influence, and by the rivalry among the Big Powers. Moreover, deep revolutionary transformations began to occur in the Chinese society: there appeared new social forces and programmes of radical reforms. China became the scene of a clash between the forces of the world revolution and of the world imperialism. This accounted for the extreme complexity of the political situation in China in the 1920s.

The disintegration of China into areas controlled by local warlords was conditioned — as paradoxical as it may seem — by the character of the bureaucratic state, by the complete subordination of the army to civilian officials. The system of military rule had been developing for decades within the Ch'ing imperial system. The provinces had considerable independence which increased as the imperial power grew weaker. The governor of a province had his own treasury, he often conducted a foreign policy virtually of his own. The central government had at its disposal relatively small armed forces quartered in the capital and its immediate vicinity. The provinces and districts had their own armed forces, their own formations, with a different system of training, recruiting, service, regulations, etc. The use of these forces by the central government was extremely troublesome and often simply impossible. Although the governor's authority over a province was

exercized in virtue of an imperial mandate, in practice the local administration authorities performed their functions basing themselves upon their own armed forces. The local armed forces performed various public functions and served the needs of the local bureaucratic apparatus; their commanders were subordinated to the heads of the civilian administration or were dependent upon them. In spite of the separation of civilian and military functions, there also existed as a rule considerable individual mobility. Military commanders passed on to posts of civilian officials which was considered a promotion. Since the Taiping rising, such a type of career of military commanders becoming higher civilian officials was very frequent. After the reforms of 1905, with the liquidation of the system of civil imperial examinations which was replaced by a system of state military schools, all the new administration personnel would have to come from the army. It is true, however, that in view of the domination of civilian values and cultural patterns, the Chinese military had a semi-civilian character and frequently stressed their civilian functions and character. This served to enhance their prestige with the public, which was relatively small in view of the general contempt for the soldier's profession, the condemnation of war by the traditional culture and the predominance of civilian officials in the State.

As a result of the reforms carried out at the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th which concerned chiefly the military organization, the army was the relatively most modernized organizational structure; the implementation in the army of a broad educational programme and the rousing of patriotic feelings, made the army receptive to new ideas and the military — pioneers of progressive transformations. In the situation of an imminent political crisis and of the collapse of the imperial system, the local commanders not only had at their disposal armed forces but also represented the necessary moral and political authority. This seems to be one of the reasons for the failure of the efforts of civilian revolutionaries of Sun Yat-sen's type. The revolution of 1911 which had a largely national character of the struggle for the overthrow of the Manchu rule in China, was accomplished with the active participation of Chinese formations which had been brought up for many years by their leaders in the

spirit of love for their country and in the conviction about the importance of the army in the life of that country and about the historic mission of restoring the power of China.² No wonder therefore that the military took over the power after the revolution.

The system of military rule in China has not been subjected so far to scientific Marxist analysis. It is worthwhile therefore to recall here certain elements of such analysis that appeared in the discussions of scholars and political leaders in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. K. A. Harinski, maintained that the Chinese war-lord system was a supra-class force, connected neither with the bourgeoisie nor with the still existing feudal forces. However, he admitted the idea that the war-lords might be transformed into bourgeoisie or into defenders of its class interests. Similar opinions were presented by J. Mamaev and V. Kolokolov (who stressed the inconsiderable class differentiation of the Chinese society) as well as by A. Ivin.³ V. D. Vilenskij-Sibirjakov, a very popular author at that time, while recognizing the supra-class character of the very phenomenon of the war-lord system, none the less presented individual war-lords as representatives of various groups of Chinese or foreign bourgeoisie, and sometimes even of the Chinese

² The patriotic ideas propagated in the army prior to the revolution of 1911, stressed the necessity of consolidating the Chinese state but did not appeal distinctly to national feelings; this was connected with the Manchu rule. After the revolution, in view of the overthrow of the Manchu rule and the multi-national composition of the population of China, one again emphasized above all the state element. E.g. in one of the military publications of that period, we read: "The strength or weakness of any State depends on the condition of its army. The strength or weakness of an army depends on its cadre of commanders [...]. The people of the whole state should have one heart, the army — one desire. Then, even if the country were not a big State, it could become strong after ten years, and attain a hegemonic position after twenty years. And this is, after all what we desire for China." (*Jiang-xiao jiao-yu — The Education of the Cadre of Commanders — Hun-cheng mo-fan-tuan jiao-guan shen zu-pei bian* 1915, p. 1 - 2).

³ K. A. Harinskij, *Obzor političeskoj i èkonomičeskoj žizni Kitaja, Duczjunat i reakcija*, "Narody Dalnego Vostoka," 1921, No. 2, pp. 158 - 164; J. Mamaev, V. Kolokolov, *Kitaj, strana, naselene, istorija*, Moskva 1924, pp. 215 - 228; A. Ivin, *Kitaj i Sovetskij Sojuz*, Moskva 1924, pp. 85 - 86.

proletariat.⁴ Similar was the opinion of Pozdneyev who spoke of war-lords growing into one with the Chinese bourgeoisie although he defined differently the class character of the various war-lords.⁵ The view was also voiced that Chinese war-lords were only puppets of foreign bourgeoisie.⁶ Vojtinskij was among those who came out against an over-simplified interpretation of this theory and, at the same time, against treating war-lords exclusively as representatives of the native bourgeoisie.⁷ Yet this view proved quite durable and was later adopted by many historians of the People's Republic of China. The opinion was also expressed that the war-lords, while being partly a supra-class force, were connected with the feudal system and were the defenders of feudal forces in the Chinese society.⁸ Lominadze went even so far as to present the Chinese war-lords simply as oppressors of the Chinese bourgeoisie although he admitted that certain groups of the bourgeoisie could support individual war-lords.⁹ These discussions were reflected in the official documents of the Komintern although in the initial period those documents avoided the one-sidedness of above-cited views.

In 1922, the 4th Congress of the Komintern adopted "General Theses on the Eastern Question". In those theses, the military rule in China was treated as a peculiar social formation, semi-feudal rather than semi-bourgeois, connected with the conditions

⁴ V. D. Vilenskij-Sibirjakov, *Nakanune obrazovanja komunističeskoj partii v Kitae*, "Kommunističeskij Internacjonal," 1920, No. 16, pp. 3585 - 3594; by the same author, *Kitaj, politiko-ekonomičeskij očerk*, Moskva 1923; by the same author, *Gomindan — partija kitajskoj revoljucii*, Moskva—Leningrad 1926, et al.

⁵ D. Pozdnev, *Sovremennij Kitaj, bor'ba za kitajski rynek*, Leningrad 1925.

⁶ See e.g.: A. N. Nikonov, *Sovremennij Kitaj, Kratkij obzor strany i ee vooružonnyh sil po dannym k 1-mu avgusta 1922 g.*, Moskva 1922.

⁷ G. N. Vojtinskij, *Čto proishodit v Kitae*, Moskva 1924.

⁸ See, e.g.: I. I. Sorokovnikov, *Rol' duczjunov v Kitae*, "Krasnaja Armija na Vostoke," 1921, No. 1, p. 26; E. A. Hodorov, *Novye puti v istorii Kitaja*, "Novyj Vostok," 1924, No. 6, pp. 33 - 34.

⁹ XV Sjezd Vsesojuznoj Kommunističeskoj Partii (bolševikov), *Stenografičeskij otčet*, Moskva—Leningrad 1928, p. 664; "Internacional Press Conference," VIII, No. 1 (5 Jan. 1928), p. 23.

of colonial oppression. That formation of native origin was to be used by foreign capitalism as an instrument and medium of its domination in China.¹⁰

According to the Komintern leaders, the character of the military rule in China could not be qualified univocally in European class categories as either feudal or bourgeois, nor could it be analyzed exclusively in terms of the internal class configuration. One should take into account the relation to the oppressing country. Yet the authors of the Theses were inclined to treat the local war-lords in China as an element of the feudal structures or as their equivalent shaped under the conditions of colonial oppression, rather than as a representative of the nascent bourgeoisie.

In 1926, at the 6th Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the Komintern, an animated discussion on the Chinese war-lord system took place in the specially established Eastern Commission. The remarks made by A. S. Bubnov seem to have been the most interesting. He said, *inter alia*:

"It is said that the Chinese war-lord system is nothing but the generals. On the other hand, it is also said that the Chinese war-lord system is a formation of the feudal or semi-feudal type. I must say that each of these definitions, taken in isolation, would be wrong.

"The Chinese war-lord system is a military organization, an organization of the armed forces. The Chinese war-lord system is one of the basic channels of capitalist accumulation in China. Finally, the Chinese war-lord system is a military organization and a channel of capitalist accumulation, surrounded by a whole number of state organs of semi-feudal type. [...] This military and state organization is connected with one group of foreign imperialism or another. It has a definite class character and development tendencies peculiar to it."¹¹

The resolution of the Plenary Session was based on Bubnov's

¹⁰ G. Kara-Murza (ed.), *Strategija i taktika Kominternu v nacionalno-kolonjalnoj revolucii na primere Kitaja, Sbornik dokumentov*, Moskva 1934, p. 45.

¹¹ *Komintern i Vostok. Bor'ba za leninskuju strategiju i taktiku v nacionalno-osvoboditelnom dviženii*, Moskva 1969, p. 152.

conception presented above and comprised its most essential elements.¹²

The recognition of the Chinese war-lord system as a largely autonomous political force, equiponderant, as it were, to other class forces, was connected with the conviction, shared by many Komintern leaders, on the relatively weak class differentiation of the societies of colonial countries, including the Chinese society. (The Trotskyites negated this fact, they overestimated the development of capitalism in China). The Komintern estimation brought into relief the social and political, state-building role of the war-lord system; at the same time, it pointed to its economic role — its contribution to the capitalist accumulation, which led in consequence to the growth and consolidation of capitalism in China in spite of the semi-feudal character of the war-lords' rule.

Later on, the reactionary character of the Chinese war-lord system had been exposed it was treated as a system of exploitation of the working masses, as a superstructure of the feudal and patriarchal relations prevailing in the Chinese countryside — which could only be destroyed by basic social and economic transformations. Hence, the Komintern leaders considered the agitation of the peasant masses and the starting of agrarian revolution as the crucial problem of the progress of the Chinese revolution.¹³

The functions of the Chinese war-lords and of their armies were very peculiar which was connected with peculiar traditions. Formations nominally included in the army and subordinated to local administrative authorities, performed in old China many different functions: guard and sentry service, representative guard at state Offices, police and order duties, transportation. They were used for public works, and sometimes combined service with productive labour. Specialization processes in the army and attempts to disencumber it from the multitude of civilian functions, were first in-

¹² Cf. the text of the resolution in: *Komintern i VKP(b) o kitajskoj revoljucii, osnovnye položenija*, Moskva—Leningrad 1927, p. 31.

¹³ See: Statement by J. Stalin at the meeting with the students of the Sun Yat-sen University (J. Stalin, *Sočinenija*, vol. IX, Moskva 1948, pp. 240-241). See also the Resolution of the 5th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party — April 1927. (P. Mif, *Kitajskaja revolucija*, Moskva 1932, p. 119).

initiated at the end of the 19th century and at the outbreak of the 1911 revolution; the new formations that supplied cadres for the war-lord armies, were of a military character. However, under the new circumstances, in view of the disintegration of the centralized military and administrative structure and of the taking-over of local administration by the military — the process of military specialization of the army was checked. The army began again to serve the different needs of the local administration; the soldiers were also used sometimes by their commanders for transport and productive labour.

In Europe, irrespective of various transformations, there could be noticed certain general tendencies in assigning to the military their social role. In the European tradition, a commander often attained wealth from war booty and stabilized his position by obtaining grants of land and of prisoners of war. However, since such high value was attributed to war, and a victory in war was treated as a fact so to say absolute, bringing eternal glory — the spirit of enterprise was alien to the military commanders, and so was the tendency to increase their income by organizing productive work. The military were on the whole a parasitic and idle caste, squandering in peace-time the trophies won in war and waiting for a new war that would bring new spoils. Economic efficiency, obtaining income from organized productive work in agriculture or crafts, from trade or usury, could upset the social status of an army man; those were not claims to glory, they could only be detrimental to it.

In Chinese culture, war was condemned, a war victory was of considerably lesser value, military service enjoyed little prestige while a civilian administrator was surrounded with high esteem. Hence, the social pattern predominating for thousands of years was that of a military man — administrator, businessman, sometimes even engaging in trade. Such activities did not bring disgrace upon a military man as would have been the case in Europe, on the contrary, they added to his reputation. Administrative and economic activities were the basis of the military's welfare, war spoils played a secondary role. Sometimes, war brought no spoils at all. What valued trophies could a commander bring back from the Mongolian steppes, from fighting barbarian nomads or the

savage peoples of the south? Victorious campaigns, battles won, brought as a rule imperial rewards of some commercial or prestige value but the fact that those awards were paid from the treasury of a country at war made them relatively low. It was also traditional in China to get rich through corrupt practices in one's own army, to report to the superiors overestimated strength of the units, to withhold the soldiers' pay or to pay only a part of it, to withhold a part of remuneration in kind, to report overestimated prices of purchases or to make altogether fictitious purchases, to sell military property and equipment, to use the men entrusted to one's command as well as military property for productive work, for paid services rendered to third persons, etc. A Chinese commander, even when commanding his troops, was more of a businessman and profiteer than a military man mindful of the military efficiency of his forces and of the strictly military effects. In the New Army of Yuan Shi-k'ai, these practices were eliminated, one also succeeded in reducing them considerably in other modernized formations; after the revolution, however, as a result of the disintegration of the State and of the army, they reappeared with great intensity. Those traditions of thousands of years gave a specific character to the Chinese war-lord.

The war-lord treated his army as a means of gaining and maintaining power in a certain area; he treated power as a means of getting rich. He also drew his income from different kinds of economic activity and he invested the sums obtained from taxes in various enterprises and in real estate. We can find numerous examples of this in the memoirs of Soviet military men who served in China at that time as advisers in some of the armies. Thus e.g. the leader of the National Armies, Feng Yü-hsiang, established in Kalgan one of China's biggest fur-trading firms, he also owned a bank and huge herds of cattle.¹⁴ One of the generals in his grouping owned several factories in Peking and tenement houses in Tientsin. Another general had in Peking a cannery employing 250 people, land leased out, and he also engaged in trade.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ A. I. Čarepanov, *Severnyj pohod nacionalno-osvoboditelnoj armii Kitaja*, Moskva 1968, p. 35.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 286.

Soviet vice-consul in Hankow noted that General T'ang Sheng-chih, commander of the army of the Wuhan government, "[...] owns land in partnership with some buddhist temples and, at the same time, participates in purchases of land in partnership with some missionary order. He is a share-holder in many trade and industrial companies, among others in a company maintaining brothels in Changsha. He owns a steamer on the Yangtze and inns in Changsha." ¹⁶

It was not without sarcasm that A. Cherepanov summed up his impressions in the following way: "[...] in short, Fenn's higher officers were half-landowners, half-merchants." ¹⁷ Another adviser, confronting his European stereotype of a military man with the Chinese realities of the 1920s, wrote plainly: "[...] none of them was a true general." ¹⁸

Basing themselves on these facts, the Komintern leaders were inclined to treat the Chinese war-lords as participators in the industrialization of China, contributing to the development of capitalism in that country. It seems that this judgment was not entirely correct. While the Chinese war-lords did in fact establish sometimes industrial plants or participated in companies running such plants, they invested their capitals much more frequently in trade, in passenger transportation, in various service enterprises such as restaurants, hotels, brothels and gambling houses where they obtained bigger profits, as well as in tenement houses and in land. Although we do not have at our disposal data permitting to determine with precision the proportions and weight of their activities in each of these fields, it seems that trade and speculative ventures and purchases of land were predominating. The buying-up of land by war-lords sometimes assumed very big proportions.

Analyzing the situation in Chinese agriculture, Chen Han-seng wrote:

"A new type of landlord is rising from among the militarists, fattened as they are from tax incomes, loan commissions, and squeezes from soldiers' payments. These new landlords are far

¹⁶ M. I. Kazanin, *V štabe Bljuhera*, Moskva 1966, p. 94.

¹⁷ A. I. Čerepanov, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹⁸ M. I. Kazanin, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

more powerful than the landlords who belong to the old gentry because they can now collect their rents more effectively by direct force. It is said that in Kwangtung every division general, nearly every brigade general, and even most of the regimental lieutenants, possess large tracts of land in their home or neighbouring districts. Whenever and wherever such land purchases are being made and these are always extraordinarily large transactions, the prices of land and, consequently, the lease rents show a general upward tendency. Thus a new and rapid process of land concentration is taking place."¹⁹

There had existed, already previously, rather close connections between absentee landlords and the local administration. The top officials of local administration belonged to the same social class of the gentry — of cultivated and wealthy people, they were interconnected by common interests and frequently by family relationship. The local administration participated directly in the collecting of lease rents. Agents of private counting-houses in the communes were accompanied by gendarmes officially assigned by the local authorities. Thus the status of the offices collecting rents for the big land-owners in the given area, was close to that of organs of political and administrative authority.²⁰ As has already been said, big land-owners also maintained their own armed troops recognized by the local authorities. The passing of land into the possession of the local war-lord consolidated the ties between big land property and State authority. The possession of armed forces and of political power provided possibilities of more effective exploitation. Thus, inherent in this situation, were germs of a peculiar, all-embracing political and economic system. The buying-up of land by war-lords from old families of the landed gentry, which were slowly falling into poverty as a result of the over more acute economic depression, did not change the character of the exploitation of peasants, it only rendered that exploitation more intensive. The activity of war-lords in agriculture did not introduce into that sphere of economy new capitalist elements; on

¹⁹ Chen Han-Seng, *Landlord and Peasant in China. A Study of Agrarian Crisis in South China*, New York 1936, pp. XIII - XIV.

²⁰ Fei Hsiao-tung, *Peasant Life in China. A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*, New York 1946, p. 185.

the contrary, it consolidated the feudal relations and gave them pathological character. The above-quoted Chen Han-seng saw it very clearly; he showed how a peculiar vicious circle came into being: the war-lords were increasing their incomes in order to purchase the arms necessary for the suppression of peasant rebellions — and this in turn aggravated the situation of the peasants and resulted in intensified manifestations of rebellion. In the economic sense, the Chinese war-lord system was, in my opinion, of a feudal character; it was, historically, the last form of Chinese feudalism, surviving with external assistance in the conditions of China's semi-colonial dependence, already fraught with its own decline and with the inevitable necessity of a social revolution. However, that feudalism comprised certain new elements, the germs of a free-competition capitalism or of state capitalism. Naturally, there existed considerable regional differences as well as certain individual differences among the various war-lords. It should also be noted that the war-lords' activities of the capitalist type did not always consolidate the national capital because they were frequently of comprador character and were based on co-operation with foreign capital.

The Chinese war-lords not only displayed far greater energy in financial operations and in buying and selling than in military activities. Quite frequently, they even posed as civilian "scholars," they cultivated calligraphy — the most highly valued domain of art in China, they wrote poetry, thus exhibiting their intellectual and emotional culture. Wu Pei-fu may be cited here as a typical example. Feng Yü-hsiang, apparently one of the most "soldierlike" war-lords of the 1920s, was the author of a comprehensive commentary to Confucius' venerable "Springs and Autumns Annals." He chose that traditional form for expounding his opinions.²¹

We touch here upon another phenomenon of the war-lord armies. In Europe, as a result of the separation of administrative and ideological functions (the former being performed by the state, the latter having been monopolized for centuries by the Church) and of the specialization of social functions, a military commander

²¹ See: *Feng Yü-hsiang du Chun-qiū Zuo-zhuan zha-jī* [Notes of Feng Yü-hsiang at reading the Springs and Autumns Annals and of the Zuo-zhuan], in: *Shang-hai jun-xue she yin*, no date of publication.

was a specialist responsible for the preparation and the carrying-out of war operations. Only in recent times, along with the evolution and modifications of the role of the state, tendencies have been increasing also in the West to combine state-administrative and ideological as well as military and political functions. In China, a charismatic type of power was formed; in further evolution, it was only partly affected by the processes of separation of functions and of technical specialization. The role of the leader of a territorial community was formed on the same principle as the functions of the head of a patriarchal clan, it extended over all the essential aspects of the subjects' life and over spheres that in the West were usually not associated with the apparatus of the state. According to the official Confucianist doctrine, state administration should first of all attend to the education of the population, care for their proper morale, ideas and actions, and only in the second place engage in administration proper and in the organization of productive processes. The head of the family, the local official, the Emperor also performed certain cult functions; in the case of the head of family and of the head of state, those functions were the basis of their power. The title to perform these functions and, consequently, the administrative and educational functions as well, came from the particular spiritual quality of the individual — called "te" — which could be transmitted by inheritance. Military leadership had to be of the same charismatic and patriarchal type, as it was the only type known to the traditional Chinese society. In the end of the 19th century, along with the progress of modernization of the army, this situation began to undergo certain changes but the impersonal discipline of orders did not assume full shape. The obedience of both an enlisted man and an officer was the obedience to a specific person whose authority he recognized, and not to an anonymous superior. The modernized armies retained to a considerable extent the "personal" character, the men were obliged to obey their commanding officer — and only him, the officers — to obey their general, etc. This practice was intensified in the war-lord armies. This determined the very peculiar internal relations in those armies and their mode of functioning.²²

²² Rich information material on the specific character of actions of

In the conditions of an extremely profound ideological crisis, of a collapse of the Confucianist ideology which had been accepted for thousands of years, of a depreciation of recognized values, of a crisis of culture — and with the existing traditions of ideological and educational functions of the state authority — the war-lords had to perform ideological functions in relation to the army and to the entire community in the area administered by them. Under such circumstances, almost each of the more prominent war-lords of the 1920s propagated some doctrine that was in most cases a combination of religion and of social ideas, usually of nationalism. In the initial period, religion played a greater role, later on however nationalism proved predominant. Wu Pei-fu appeared as a fervent follower of buddhism, he even more than once spent some time in a monastery — but this did not prevent him from beheading deserters with his own hands. T'ang Sheng-chih was a propagator of buddhism, his adviser was a buddhist monk who organized the teaching of that doctrine in the units under T'ang's command. Feng Yü-hsiang in turn was a devotee of methodism, missionaries worked within his army, and the soldiers had to attend mass every day, sing psalms and observe religious rules and interdictions under penalty of disciplinary punishment.²³ Chiang Kai-shek who represented a different type of war-lord rule, was a votary of Protestantism; in his speeches to the nation, he referred not only to Confucius, to 19th-century Chinese leaders, to Sun Yat-sen, but also to God and the Bible.

Besides religious doctrines, many of the war-lords propagated ideas of patriotism and nationalism, of revolution and socialism.

the war-lord armies, based on personal experience of work in the Chinese army, is to be found in: V. Vysogorec (pen-name of V. Goriev), *Kitajskaja armija*, Moskva—Leningrad 1930, and in the memoirs of other Soviet advisers who worked in China at that time, recently published in the U.S.S.R. A confrontation of these accounts with the publications of the staffs of various Chinese armies and with specialistic military literature, offers interesting results. It shows clearly that most elements that made up that specific character of actions, originated from attempts to recur to Chinese military traditions.

²³ M. I. Kazanin, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 - 95; A. V. Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitajskoj revoljucii 1925 - 1927 gg.*, Moskva 1970, p. 37; A. I. Čerepanov, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Wu Pei-fu spoke of socialism, Ch'en Chung-ming, a fierce opponent of Sun Yat-sen, declared his warm support for it. This even caused a serious crisis in the Canton organization of the Chinese Communist Party which supported that war-lord in defiance of recommendations of the Komintern. Feng Yü-hsiang, Chiang Kai-shek and many others spoke of revolution and nationalism, of the national interest, etc. This was connected with the general ideological confusion of those years, the dissemination among the public of many theories contradictory to one another, with a hectic search for one's place in the world and for the solution of swollen problems of life. Irrespective of the war-lords' intentions, of the sincerity of their pronouncements, and of their interpretation of patriotic and revolutionary ideas, the preaching of those ideas played a positive role; it aroused national consciousness, it propagated the awareness of the necessity of social transformations, the conviction about the greatness of the revolution's work and of its historical inevitability.

Obviously, not all the war-lords assumed the role of ideological leaders just as not all of them could write good poetry. The others, in particular the minor ones, came out simply as advocates of "law and order," of "high morale," of "salvation of the country," without precisizing the sense of these concepts and the ways of attaining the goals thus set. Some of them preached respect for high moral principles and enforced their observance by using cruel punishments that were meant to evoke the respect of others.²⁴ Others acted more subtly. Chang Tso-lin, for example, was the author of the idea — which later was to play a big role in the history of the Chinese Communist Party — of transforming the army into a school of civilian cadres, of initiators of reforms, of progress and of raising the peasants' morale.²⁵ The implementation of these concepts was connected with the relatively greater political stability in Manchuria which was under Chang's authority.

Extremely interesting is the question what the origin of the

²⁴ L. M. King, *China in Turmoil. Studies in Personality*, London 1927, pp. 15 - 17.

²⁵ See: *Jun-guan fu-wu zhi can-kao* [*Handbook of Officer's Work*], Fengtian 1926, p. 9.

war-lords and the course of their career were. The answer to this question is rather difficult, and it is almost impossible to assemble adequate biographical material relating to all persons that might interest a student of this problem. In order to arrive at an answer, if only approximative, the author has analyzed the biographical material contained in *Who's Who in China*, published in Shanghai in 1925 by the editors of *China Weekly Review*.²⁶ This publication is sufficiently detailed. A preliminary analysis and a comparison with other material proved that it is also reliable enough. It contains biographies of military men belonging, for the most part, to the group of "old war-lords" which is of main interest to us here; it does not include names that did not gain prominence until 1925 - 1927 or later. We find there, first of all, names of generals from the Pei-yang clique. War-lords not belonging to that clique, in particular those from South, West and North-West China and from Manchuria were often omitted; from these regions, only the name of the leading war-lord was usually given. More detailed information can also be found with regard to the sphere of action of Shanghai business. It is probably for this reason (although it may also be connected with the geographical criterion) that the publication contains chiefly names of people who were educated abroad and maintained closer relations with foreigners. Omitted are many war-lords from interior regions who graduated from local schools or did not complete any school, and who were more conservative and traditionalistic. That group probably included more people with spectacular careers, adventurers of various sorts, former leaders of robber bands, etc. All these reservations notwithstanding, the analysis of this biographical material is illuminating.

The publication includes 97 biographies of military men. Out of these, eight obviously could not have been war-lords (five admirals, one captain of the air force, one police captain, one lieutenant — specialist in ship-building). The remaining 89 persons with the ranks of army generals or marshals, either were or had been

²⁶ *Who's Who in China (Biographies of Chinese)*, published by *The China Weekly Review*, Shanghai 1925.

or, at least, could have become war-lords. Their road to military career was as follows:

Graduates of Chinese military schools	30(34 ⁰ / ₀)
Graduates of Japanese military schools	17(19 ⁰ / ₀)
Former members of the imperial army	11(12 ⁰ / ₀)
Former civilian imperial officials	10(11 ⁰ / ₀)
Former leaders of robber bands	5(6 ⁰ / ₀)
Persons who had received civilian education and later-on formed an armed group of their own or joined the existing armed forces	5(6 ⁰ / ₀)
Started their military career as privates	4(4 ⁰ / ₀)
Came to military service because of influence and personal connections	3(3 ⁰ / ₀)
Former pedlar	1(1 ⁰ / ₀)
No data	3(3 ⁰ / ₀)

The above classification is very incomplete; this is due to the character of the source which does not always give the necessary data; additional information from other sources has not always made it possible to solve the question. Noteworthy is the high number of people who obtained officer's rank by graduating from Chinese schools. They account for the most numerous and, at the same time, the most differentiated category. Actually, the information that someone graduated from a Chinese military school does not exclude almost any of the other roads of career, like obtaining the officer's degree through personal or family connections (such students sometimes did not even complete the full course at school), entering the military school by a man with completed civilian education, by an enlisted man who had somebody's support and recommendation, by a leader of a robber band, by an enlisted man or officer of the Banner Forces. It can be generally assumed, however, that a considerable part of those who moved up by graduation from a military school, had not previously engaged in other activities and came from relatively wealthy families.

It would follow from this analysis that more than 70% of war-lords came from well-to-do or rich families. This estimate is made with the greatest caution. It shakes the widely accepted view that most war-lords came from the peasantry and the lower classes.²⁷ Undoubtedly, some of them did come from the lower classes of the society, from the poor and the déclassé elements. On the whole, it was a highly differentiated group.

As regards class divisions, the officers' cadre of the war-lord armies seems to have been more homogeneous. Sociological material of quite unique character concerning the war-lord armies of the North was compiled by Olga Lang who in the years 1934 - 1937 was employed in the personnel department of a hospital. She assembled biographical data on 345 enlisted men and 250 officers from war-lord armies stationing in the neighbourhood or passing by the region of the hospital, who were admitted to the hospital as wounded.

According to her investigations, two-thirds of the officers were sons of big land-owners or of rich peasants owning more than 50 mu of land, and of merchants. Among officers with the rank of lian-chang (in command of 120 men) or higher, barely 10% came from families owning less than 30 mu of land, and not a single one was the son of a worker, day-labourer, petty farmer or poor medium-sized farmer (less than 10 mu). Very few were promoted to officers from the ranks, relatively many became officers by graduating from military schools, which was connected with the financial means of their families.²⁸

The social origin of enlisted men was quite different. A total of 73.5% of them came from poor or indigent families, only 11.5%

²⁷ See e.g.: Hsi-sheng Chi, *The Chinese Warlord System as an International System*, in: *Harris Conference on New Approaches to International Relations, June 1 - 4, 1966*, University of Chicago, pp. 11, 25. This view probably originates from the reminiscences of direct witnesses of these events who point to the fact (surprising them) that some war-lords came from the lower classes of the society but fail to say that most of them came from well-to-do classes. (See e.g.: L. M. King, *op. cit.*, p. 68; A. I. Čerepanov, *op. cit.*, p. 37).

²⁸ O. Lang, *The God Iron of the New Chinese Army*, "Pacific Affairs," vol. XIII, No. 1 (March 1939), pp. 28 - 29.

from wealthier ones (no data for 15%). An interesting regularity could be noted: relatively few men came from the poorest groups of the population, a greater number from families slightly better-off, and the percentage drastically dropped again when reaching the threshold of affluence. Additional questions permitted to ascertain that most men had joined the army as a result of a sudden ruin of the family, of a quarrel at home, etc.²⁹ It could therefore be stated that joining the army were, above all, people thrown out of relatively comfortable circumstances, coming from the poorer classes who resigned themselves to the vicissitudes of soldier's life seeing no other way out. Thus Olga Lang's findings do not fully corroborate the current opinion that joining the army were the poorest; it would be more adequate to define them as *déclassé* elements, coming for the most part from the lower classes of the society. The greatly advanced disintegration of the soldiers' family life and the fact that they had sunk in social scale, made them a very peculiar element which in turn was reflected in the character of the army (among other things, it was conducive to the consolidation of personal ties between the soldiers and their commanders, and to the transplantation into the army of patterns of a patriarchal family) and created many difficult problems.

The Chinese war-lord system was neither a congealed nor a homogeneous form. A few years after the disintegration of the country into areas controlled by various war-lord armies, complex processes of transformations began. Speaking most generally, one can distinguish four types of evolution of the war-lord system, appearing in different regions. It should be stressed, however, that those new and dynamic types of the war-lord system were but small islands in the sea of war-lord armies and local "prince-lings," still surviving in spite of the changes taking place in the country and in the world. The old war-lord system proved very durable.

The first type might be defined as a stabilization of the war-lord system. It was represented by the armies of Chang Tso-lin. In Manchuria remaining under his authority, he created a stable and rather efficient administrative system. Social unrest in the

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 24 - 25.

rural areas was less acute there because of the relatively greater affluence of the countryside and the prevalence of middle-sized farms. In the towns, industry and trade were developing. The national capital was growing, foreign capital — chiefly Japanese — was making considerable investments. The officers' corps was participating in these processes, of course. Technical modernization was making progress. The adoption of foreign technologies and equipment was accompanied by referring to old Chinese ideological traditions and to old Confucianist values. This combining of new technology with old social patterns adapted to the new conditions, created numerous paradoxes and accounted for various weaknesses but it sometimes yielded positive effects as well. The army played a central role in social and political life, it was treated as a school for the cadres of organizers of social life, initiators of the development and transformations of the country. In propaganda and in education, one referred to patriotic ideas but without giving them anti-imperialistic content. Nor were separatist ideas emphasized, and Manchuria was evidently treated as a part of China. Brought into the foreground was the programme of the state's care for the life and welfare of the people. The Manchurian armies were undoubtedly the best armed and trained in all China at that time. The system was not free of contradictions. In the officers' corps there was strong opposition against the pro-Japanese policy of the Commander, there were patriotic and anti-imperialist tendencies, demands of a greater independence from foreign capital were made — which sometimes led to dramatic disturbances. On the whole, it was a very stable system but, at the same time, showing little dynamism in outside expansion. It had no attractive ideology and no watchwords that would enable it to gain broader public support in China. When fighting, the Manchurian armies engaged in purely military operations, striving to defeat the enemy by the ascendancy of modern equipment. The occupation of Manchuria by Japan in 1931 put an end to the existence of that system although the new system established in Manchoukuo retained many of its elements.

The second type of evolution was represented by the armies of Feng Yü-hsiang. That grouping was more differentiated internally and its rule was less stabilized. Feng Yü-hsiang posed as "a simple

man from the people," he made demagogic speeches in which he exposed his democratism, his care for the people's welfare, his patriotism, the necessity of fight against foreign imperialism, the wrongs the latter had inflicted upon the Chinese nation, the need to restore China's old greatness. Sometimes he also condemned severely Chinese reaction and the relicts of feudalism. In the less developed regions that were under his control, native and comprador capital showed weaker growth, foreign capital also played a minor role. Of relatively greater importance in the economy were the activities of war-lords, mainly in small industries, trade and banking. Feng Yü-hsiang strove to gain control over the economy by forming a system of his own banks and monopolistic forms of trade. He supported the establishment of social organizations and the activities of trade unions but imposed restrictions on those of political parties which were carriers of foreign influence. He developed the school system and introduced social legislation. Many of his ideas and plans remained unimplemented either because of the changing political situation or because of his leaning towards demagogy. The modernization of the society and of the army in the territory under his control was carried on with distinct reference to foreign models rather than to Chinese tradition. An important role was played by Soviet patterns which he adopted in full consciousness (he was receiving Soviet aid). Feng's system was largely based on his personal authority; this, rather than functional efficiency, accounted for the strength of the system. He based the education of his armies on the ideology of Christianity. The armies were relatively weak in combat, they were wanting in modern equipment, training and adequately built-up morale. In spite of endeavours to sanify the moral atmosphere in the army and to recruit healthy rural youth to it, a large part of his troops met with a hostile attitude of the population which treated them as ordinary war-lord forces. Various elements of Feng's system were later introduced into the Kuomintang system. As for Feng's system itself, it survived until the beginnings of the Japanese aggression in 1937, undergoing certain transformations. Feng unquestionably enjoyed great popularity with the Chinese society but the system created by him was too weak to take up the work of re-unification of China.

The third type of evolution of a war-lord army may be represented by Ch'en Chiung-ming. His importance on China's national political scene was incomparably smaller than that of the two former war-lords (he controlled only the region of Canton) but he deserves attention because of the character of his actions.

Ch'en Chiung-ming declared the will to carry out social reforms of the socialist type, to modernize the country, improve the living conditions of the people and support the national bourgeoisie. Patriotic ideas in his interpretation had an anti-imperialistic tinge but since he acted in a sphere under direct control of the Powers, those accents were not marked very distinctly. The basis of his power was the army but he wanted to build above it a civilian apparatus of authority, partly of puppet character. He also contemplated the convening of a parliament, tending to build around his authority constitutional representative and executive organs so as to disguise the real fact of the army's power. It was to this end that he brought Sun Yat-sen to Canton; this, however, caused serious difficulties and brought about a conflict between the army and the civilian apparatus of power created by it. Ch'en Chiung-ming permitted the legal functioning of political parties in Canton — the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, striving to win their support. He admitted their representatives to participation in the government, declared understanding and support for their programmes, and endeavoured to exercise control over political forces by intensifying antagonisms among them and by complex manoeuvring. It should be remembered that most of the war-lords at that time punished affiliation to these parties with death, and persecuted all political movements as undermining their power. Ch'en Chiung-ming not only allowed the activities of trade unions but even supported them which won him popularity among the workers. He also supported the merchants' guild, thus preserving good relations with the national bourgeoisie. He maintained that his power was of a supra-class character, serving the entire society, all its classes. Within the few years of his rule in Canton, he did more for that city than any other war-lord, even a much richer one, did for his abode: he initiated the transformation of Canton from an old town of the feudal era into a modern city, he built streets, the sewage and water-supply

system, he supported the development of the city transportation system and its electrification, he improved the sanitary conditions. Many of his undertakings were carried on by the Sun Yat-sen government but the population remembered that it was Ch'en who had initiated them. His army remained a war-lord army, however, with all the weaknesses resulting from it. Nor did he improve the situation of the peasants in the Canton region. His weak point was the distinctly marked localism which made it difficult for him to play a broader role on the national scene although it gave him relative strength in the province of Kwangtung. His activities served above all the national bourgeoisie with which he was connected and whose support he used. A development of his system would have led to the growth of a certain form of capitalism in China and to cultural and technological modernization. Yet the internal contradictions which he was unable to solve, as well as the strength and dynamism of his enemies, decided on his defeat. The Kuomintang created its own army and, playing off the conflicts among war-lords, in alliance with others, routed Ch'en Chiung-ming's army. Many elements of his system were later taken over by the Kuomintang when it gained power over all China in 1929.

The fourth type of evolution of the war-lord system is represented by the Canton government which originated a new type of military rule and therefore it actually goes beyond the scope of the old war-lord system we are analyzing here. In order to consolidate its position, that government, using the Soviet patterns as a model, established a mass political party—the reformed Kuomintang and the Party Army, with highly aroused political consciousness, intended as the instrument of implementing political aims. That army subsequently became the basis of a new war-lord system. Its most essential elements seem to be the following: 1) a strict combination of the military organization of the army with the political organization of the party and with the administrative structure of the state; 2) support lent to the establishment of various pro-government organizations—social, trade-union, youth, women's, etc. (along with a fierce fight against any opposition); 3) a social policy generally beneficial to the national bourgeoisie, big land-owners and wealthy peasants but reckoning

with the interests of the rest of the society and aimed at improving the situation of the basic social classes; 4) the trend to confine the role of foreign capital and of big private capital and to promote the development of state capitalism, of state industrial plants, banks, trade and transportation enterprises, etc., controlled by military men and by party notables and bringing them enormous incomes. It was an attempt to create an integral system and to subordinate — through the military and the party and through political groups connected with them — the entire economic life of the country; 5) the elaboration of a nationalistic and pseudo-revolutionary ideology, referring to old Chinese traditions but allowing certain progress, the assimilation of foreign intellectual and technological achievements — an ideology that could win the support of broad masses of the society.

In its initial stage, that system allowed China to make considerable progress; gradually, however, its class limitations and weaknesses manifested themselves, and in the period of war with Japan it began to decay rapidly — which decided ultimately on the victory of the communists in China. However, that type of military rule and the causes of its fall call for a separate analysis. It should be stressed that up to the war between Japan and China and partly even later, the military rule of the old type still existed side by side with the new Kuomintang system and even, so to say, within it; it only underwent certain modifications. An ultimate end to the war-lord system was only put by the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

An interpretation of the military rule in China in the 1920s is not easy. Chi Hsi-sheng³⁰ advanced the interesting thesis that this political system should not be analyzed as a system of one national state going through frequent internal crises but as a system of factual plurality of political structures linked by relations of inter-state character. It seems that this theory, while allowing the interpretation of many phenomena, is not fully correct. Indeed, it would be a mistake if we replaced one European pattern — of the unified national state, by another pattern — of the multiplicity of Europe's political organisms. It seems that in

³⁰ Hsi-sheng Chi, *op. cit.*

the China of that period we had to do with an intermediate system: of de-centralization advanced so far that it almost reached separateness of state type; yet manifold connections were still maintained and China remained a certain entity.

The differences between the various types of the war-lord system, their political orientations and their class connections gave a considerable dynamic quality to that form of government. In competition and struggle among various military groupings and various war-lord systems, important transformations were slowly taking place in the society and in its consciousness.³¹ It is worth noting that actually all the military formations analyzed here, with the exception of the Kuomintang National Revolutionary Army, had the character of local forces, strictly connected with a specific area. The Chinese army in the imperial period (with the exception of the Eight Banner Army, of course), in spite of modernization, did not become a representative of all-national interests, either. The military organization in China was traditionally an institutionalized form of representation of local interests; only certain formations and forces within it were representatives of social interests in the broadest sense of the term. Nationalistic ideas served quite often as a means of gaining influence in the state by local groups that propagated those ideas.

The war-lord armies of all types had direct connections with the administration, they played an active role in politics and, in certain respects, performed functions similar to those of political parties in Europe; in China, parties were very weak and it was precisely in connection with the army that they often developed. The military took an active part in the economic life of the

³¹ In the above-cited paper, Hsi-sheng Chi attempted an analysis of the transformations of the war-lord system, basing himself on the formal features of the system, on the geographical situation of the war-lord's region, etc. While his paper unquestionably marked a progress as compared to the literature on the system of military rule in China, the fact that he left out the political differences among the various groupings and the differences in class orientation, made it impossible for him to interpret a number of problems. However, the very principle of seeking the explanation of the changes in that system in China itself, and not in outside political forces, was correct.

country. Their activities in the rural areas intensified the agrarian crisis. They also performed other social, ideological, educational functions, etc. The political patterns worked-out in the 1920s played an important role in the developments of the subsequent years.

(Translated by Antoni Szymanowski)