2 China's Eruption after the First World War: Japanese Imperialism, Western Jingoism, and the Awakening of Chinese Nationalism

2.1 Introduction

Considering that China is one of the global players and a true world power today, it is almost hard to imagine that it was dominated by Western and Japanese imperialism 100 years ago.[1] For these imperialist nation states and their representatives, China had always been a "point of focus"[2] of the so–called Far Eastern problem, especially since all of the great imperialist powers aimed to get a piece of Chinese territory and access to the vast market there. The Chinese Empire under the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) was torn into colonial spheres of influence,[3] and attempts to limit the foreign influence or to force all foreigners out of the country, e.g. the Opium War (1839–1842)[4] and the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901),[5] were answered with brute force. The revolution of 1911 that British historian Rana Mitter called "unanchored"[6] was supposed to lead China

1 This chapter is an extended version of Frank Jacob, China's Eruption after the First World War: Japanese Imperialism, Western Jingoism, and the Awakening of Chinese Nationalism, in: Marcel Bois/Frank Jacob (Eds.), Zeiten des Aufruhrs (1916–1921). Globale Proteste, Streiks und Revolutionen gegen den Ersten Weltkrieg und seine Auswirkungen, Berlin 2020, pp. 171–213.

2 Wesley R. Fishel, The Far East and United States Policy: A Re–Examination, in: The Western Political Quarterly 3 (1950) 1, pp. 1–13, here p. 1.

3 Niels P. Petersson, Imperialismus und Modernisierung. Siam, China und die europäischen Mächte 1895–1914, Munich 2000, pp. 35–90. On the impact of these experiences on China and the Chinese see Matthew P. Fitzgerald/Peter Monteath (Eds.), Colonialism, China and the Chinese, New York/London 2019.

4 For dicussions of this war see Peter Ward Fay, The Opium War, 1840–1842, paperback edition, Chapel Hill, NC, 1997 [1975]; Haijian Mao, The Qing Empire and the Opium War. The Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty, Cambridge 2016; Stephen R. Platt, Imperial Twilight. The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age, New York 2019.

5 Susanne Kuß/Bernd Martin (Eds.), Das Deutsche Reich und der Boxeraufstand, Munich 2002; Mechthild Leutner/Klaus Mühlhahn (Eds.), Kolonialkrieg in China. Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900–1901, Berlin 2007; Jean Jaques Wendorff, Der Boxeraufstand in China 1900/1901 als deutscher und französischer Erinnerungsort. Ein Vergleich anhand ausgewählter Quellengruppen, Frankfurt am Main 2016. For a detailed discussion of German violence related to the Boxer Rebellion also see Susanne Kuß, Deutsches Militär auf kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen. Eskalation von Gewalt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 2005.

6 Rana Mitter, 1911. The Unanchored Chinese Revolution, in: The China Quarterly 208 (2011), pp. 1009–1020.

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into modernity and independence, but the First World War (1914–1918) would prove that these dreams had not yet been fulfilled, although the war was tremendously important for Asia in general and East Asia in particular, as Chinese historian Xu Guoqi remarked: "Research on the war's impact there and Asians' contributions has been insufficient, especially from Asian perspectives."[7] One simply has to agree with Xu's evaluation, and he claims that "given the relevance and importance of the Great War to Asian countries, it was as defining an event there as elsewhere."[8] When one considers how the war and its Asian events determined China's future, one of course cannot deny its impact on Sino–Japanese relations.

To quote Xu once more, "Asians may not be aware of the Great War, but that war nonetheless shaped their modern fate in significant ways," and it is important to consider "national aspirations and development, foreign relations, and Asians' perceptions of themselves and the world"[9] when talking about the First World War from a more global perspective. Asia is an important region of the world today, which is why it is even more important to better understand its past, as it was embedded in the global events of the 20th century. Many hopes, dreams, and aspirations were attached to the conflict in China, as well as in Japan, and the political leaders of both nation states attempted to profit from the war in Europe. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the events in East Asia between 1914 and 1918, because they would determine the history of both countries in the years to come, even up to today. Contemporaries, like the British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), had realized that "[t]he most urgent problem in China's relations with foreign powers is Japanese aggression."[10] This aggression marked the 20th century from a Chinese perspective, because the Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo–Japanese War

7 Xu Guoqi, Asia and the Great War. A Shared History, New York 2017, p. 2. This evaluation is correct, considering that Xu provided the only chapter on Asia in the three volumes of the Cambridge History of the First World War, edited by Jay Winter, historian and professor at Yale University. Xu Guoqi, Asia, in: Jay Winter (Ed.), The Cambridge History of the First World War, Vol. 1, Cambridge 2014, pp. 479–510.

8 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 3.

10 Bertrand Russell, The Problem of China, London 1922, p. 130. On Russell's experiences in China see: Mirela David, Bertrand Russell and Ellen Key in China. Idividualism, Free Love, and Eugenics in the May Fourth Era, in: Howard Chiang (Ed.), Sexuality in China. Histories of Power and Pleasure, Seattle, WA 2018, pp. 76–98; Eric Hayot, Bertrand Russell's Chinese Eyes, in: Modern Chinese Literature and Culture 18 (2006) 1, pp. 120–154; Suzanne P. Ogden, The Sage in the Inkpot. Bertrand Russell and China's Social Reconstruction in the 1920s, in: Modern Asian Studies 16 (1982) 4, pp. 529–600.

(1904–1905), and the First World War brought Japan's ambitions for expansion to light.[11] However, the latter one also stimulated China's internationalization as a political power, and its representatives were interested in participating in as well as influencing matters of global politics. The war, regardless of its destruction, had also promised the establishment of a new international order, one from which Chinese intellectuals and politicians alike were hoping to receive a new chance to redefine China's fate and position in the world.[12]

The Japanese expansionist ambitions on the Asian mainland, however, left no space for such idealist hopes. Like Japan, the Chinese republican government had entered the war trying to secure its own position within the East Asian region, but all in all, as Xu correctly highlights, "[t]he China–Japan connection in the Great War is one of tragedy, irony, and contradiction."[13] Both governments tried to gain from their participation in the war, but while Japan used its Anglo–Japanese Alliance with Britain to be part of the winning side in the war and to gain control over Shandong, i.e. Chinese territory that had been leased by the German Kaiserreich, China only joined the Allies later to recover the rights to its own possessions. Between these two decisions, Japan presented the Twenty–One Demands, which will be discussed in more detail later, to China in 1915, which, according to Russell, "gave the Chinese Question its modern form."[14] The British philosopher continues his evaluation as follows:

> These demands involved, as is obvious, a complete loss of Chinese independence, the closing of important areas to the commerce and industry of Europe and America, and a special attack upon the British position in the Yangtze. We [the British, F.J.], however, were so busy with the war that we had no time to think of keeping ourselves alive. Although the demands constituted a grave menace to our trade, although the Far East was in an uproar about them, although America took drastic diplomatic action against them, Mr. Lloyd George never heard of them until they were explained to him by the Chinese Delegation at Versailles.[15]

Japan had clearly undertaken the quest to gain from the absence of the European powers in East Asia, and China could only hope for foreign intervention to

11 On Japan's growing military and expansionist ambitions in Asia between 1868 and 1905 see Da Yang, Leng yan jia wu. Kan Riben jun shi di guo de gou jian he bao fa (1868–1905), Beijing 2015. On the local and global impact of the Russo–Japanese War see Frank Jacob, The Russo–Japanese War and Its Impact on the Twentieth Century, paperback edition, London/New York 2019 [2018].

12 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 10.

13 Ibid., p. 38.

14 Russell, Problem of China, p. 131.

15 Ibid., pp. 132–133.

avoid being ripped off and losing a large part of its territorial and political rights, even its independence. China's position, according to the understanding of many Chinese intellectuals and politicians, could only be saved by a new world order that was based on Woodrow Wilson's (1856–1924) demands for such an order.

When the peace conference at Versailles failed to deliver Wilson's principles in the form of actual politics, China and its people felt betrayed, and protests, namely the May Fourth Movement, demanded fair treatment for the Chinese Republic and a return of its rights to Shandong from the Germans. The movement therefore had a clearly anti–imperialist character, something that made Mao Zedong (1893–1976) interpret it in 1939 as a stage in the long–term history of the Chinese Revolution, "a step beyond the Revolution of 1911":

> The May [Fourth] Movement twenty years ago marked a new stage in China's bourgeois–democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism. The cultural reform movement which grew out of the May [Fourth] Movement was only one of the manifestations of this revolution. With the growth and development of new social forces in that period, a powerful camp made its appearance in the bourgeois–democratic revolution, a camp consisting of the working class, the student masses and the new national bourgeoisie.[16]

For Mao, the movement resembled the awakening of Chinese intellectuals, who "were more numerous and more politically conscious than in the days of the Revolution of 1911." Of course, retrospectively, and from Mao's communist viewpoint and according to his theoretical assumptions, "the intellectuals will accomplish nothing if they fail to integrate themselves with the workers and peasants."[17]

Regardless of such doctrinaire evaluations, 1919 marked a watershed year in modern Chinese history, marking one of two attempts – the other being in 1898 – for an "intellectual break with the values of Confucian civilization." The May Fourth Movement was consequently not only an expression of anti–imperialist nationalism, but at the same time was seen by traditional elites "as an attack upon

16 Mao Tse–tung, The May 4th Movement, in: Selected Works of Mao Tse–tung, Vol. 2, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_13.htm (17. 9. 2019). A similar evaluation can be found in Mao Tse–tung, The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party, in: Selected Works of Mao Tse–tung, Vol. 2, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm#p4 (17. 9. 2019), where Mao states: "The Opium War, the Movement of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Sino–French War, the Sino–Japanese War, the Reform Movement of 1898, the Yi Ho Tuan Movement, the Revolution of 1911, the May 4th Movement, the May 30th Movement, the Northern Expedition, the Agrarian Revolutionary War and the present War of Resistance Against Japan – all testify to the Chinese people's indomitable spirit in fighting imperialism and its lackeys."

17 Mao, May 4th Movement.

the traditional moral and social orders as well."[18] Modernizing universities under an enlightened leadership – Beijing University (Beida) was led by Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), a philosopher educated in China and Germany (Leipzig University)[19] – provided the ground for the "great intellectual upsurge of 1919," because students were presented with new educational opportunities when men like Yuanpei "welcomed ideas from all over the world and collected a faculty of brilliant young men of diverse backgrounds."[20] These academic changes created a self–confident student body, whose representatives were interested in China's modernization and wanted to gain recognition for their nation within the international order as well. They shared this latter aspect with a large number of Chinese people, who had realized that Japan's ambitions, well and clearly expressed in the Twenty–One Demands, threatened not only the integrity of China but even its whole existence as an independent nation state. Eventually, when more than 3,000 students protested on 4 May 1919 at the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen), whose protests were violently met by the government, it was "[t]he whole patriotic public [that] was aroused,"[21] and the consequence was further student protests in around 200 places, as well as strikes in factories in Shanghai and other cities. The American political scientist and Sinologist Benjamin I. Schwartz (1916–1999) therefore described the events correctly when he characterized them as "[a] student movement [that] was born in which women participated, broad public support was enlisted, and the sanction of saving China was invoked to achieve an unprecedented degree of student organization and activism. This was a new political expression of nationalism, all the more significant because it was unpremeditated."[22]

Nevertheless, the events of 4 May 1919 and its consequences should not solely be understood from a political perspective, but must be analyzed with all

18 Charlotte Furth, Intellectual Change. From the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895–1920, in: Denis Twitchett/John K. Fairbank (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1, Cambridge 1983, p. 322.

19 Ibid., p. 323. For a more detailed analysis of Cai's role in early 20th century China see Cai Jianguo, Cai Yuanpei. Gelehrter und Mittler zwischen Ost und West, Münster 1998; William J. Duiker, Ts'ai Yuan–p'ei. Educator of Modern China, University Park, PA 1977. On Cai's educational concepts see Peili Wang, Wilhelm von Humboldt und Cai Yuanpei. Eine vergleichende Analyse zweier klassischer Bildungskonzepte in der deutschen Aufklärung und in der ersten chinesischen Republik, Münster/New York 1996.

20 Benjamin I. Schwartz, Themes in Intellectual History. May Fourth and After, in: Denis Twitchett/John K. Fairbank (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1, Cambridge 1983, p. 406.

21 Schwartz, Themes, p. 407.

22 Ibid.

its cultural complexities, since a new generation was beginning to demand a new China that was not only politically independent, but also culturally and intellectually different from its past.[23] The present chapter will therefore show why 1919 must be considered a watershed year in Chinese history and what role the First World War played in it. At first, China's situation at the beginning of the war will be described and then the country's role and development during the global conflict will be discussed. Eventually, China's position at the Peace Conference in Versailles will be analyzed before a closer look is taken at the May Fourth Movement. The chapter will thereby show how the global conflict shaped the Chinese position in the early 20th century and which forces were awakened by Japanese imperialism, Western jingoism, and Chinese conservatism to be finally combined in a national protest movement. The First World War is consequently considered to have acted as a cataclysm that provoked this national upheaval in China as part of an international wave of protest movements in the aftermath of the war that was considered to end all conflicts and to introduce a new international order, based on the liberal ideas of Wilson and his like–minded colleagues.

2.2 China in 1914

Economically, China as a whole seemed to change only between 1912 and the end of the civil war in 1949.[24] The average individual's income neither increased nor decreased, and the rapid growth since the late 19th century seems to have been stopped by internal turmoil and the wars the Chinese have been involved in since their revolution in 1911. American historian Albert Feuerwerker highlighted that "[t]he relative factor supplies of land, labour and capital remained basically unaltered" and "[t]he occupational distribution of the population was hardly changed."[25] China, and this might have been one of the most important problems of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 as well, was mainly agricultural, with people in this sector making their living on family farms that numbered from 60 to 70 million across the country. 50% of these farms were owned by peasants, while 25% were partly rented farms, and the

23 Fabio Lanza, Behind the Gate. Inventing Students in Beijing, New York 2010, p. 101.

24 The description of China's economy follows, if not indicated otherwise, Albert Feuerwerker, Economic Trends, 1912–49, in: Denis Twitchett/John K. Fairbank (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1, Cambridge 1983, pp. 28–127.

25 Ibid., 28.

remaining 25% were in the hands of tenant farmers. Most Chinese were consequently living in smaller villages, making their living as peasants. They were consequently not only hard to reach in the centralizing attempts by the government, but also for those who chanted the song of Chinese nationalism in 1919.

While the larger cities with ties to foreign powers became hubs of economic and intellectual exchange, the rural areas of the country remained peripheral. The consequence was "larger regional marketing complexes" with important centers that linked "inter–provincial and inter–regional commerce."[26] In cities like Nanking, Hankow, Chungking, etc., along with the capital Beijing and internationally important trade centers like Hong Kong and Shanghai, an economic increase was visible and changed the urban environments, but almost none of it was felt in the far–away provinces, where local identity determined the daily life of the Chinese farmers. Due to the economic processes that could be observed in these larger cities, the urban population of China was growing during the late 19th century, even increasing the speed of urbanization after 1900. Nevertheless, in 1938, only around 27 million people – out of a population of 500 million – were living in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. China could therefore hardly be called an urban society, which is why Mao's claim from 1939, that a revolutionary party would need to include the workers *and* peasants to be successful, is correct, especially when one wants to explain one of the problems of the May Fourth Movement, which will be taken into closer consideration later.

The contacts with Western and Japanese traders had an impact on China, for sure, but primarily on those who operated in the named economic centers, where national companies got connected to the global market. Most of the 430 million Chinese people (1912) did not gain from the economic developments in these, sometimes far away, urban centers. Twenty years after the First World War, almost 80% of people were still working in the agrarian sector, although the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 had stimulated the founding of manufacturing companies and mining enterprises that were privately owned by Chinese rather than foreign investors. These more than 500 enterprises, however, could only accumulate a capital of around Ch.$ 20 million, i.e. only a fraction of the invested foreign capital in China at the time.[27] Before and also during the war,

26 Ibid., 32.

27 For a detailed discussion of the development of capitalism in China see Wu Chengming, A Brief Account of the Development of Capitalism in China, in: Tim Wright (Ed.), The Chinese Economy in the Early Twentieth Century. Recent Chinese Studies, London 1992, pp. 29–43. For an analysis of China's relation to the global market William N. Goetzmann/Andrey D. Ukhov/Ning Zhu, China and the World Financial Markets 1870–1939. Modern Lessons from Historical Globalization, in: The Economic History Review 60 (2007) 2, pp. 267–312 is recommended.

however, Chinese–owned industry expanded, and more than 2,000 new factories had been established by 1920.[28] The Chinese economy, like that of the Japanese (as will be shown in another chapter), profited from the absence of European competition during the First World War. That China would be unable to use this positive trend, however, is related to political instabilities rather than economic incapacities. Most of the said companies, to name just one problem, were based in Shanghai or other urban centers, so the gained capital was not equally invested in the growth of a national economic sector. In addition, the immense growth of the Chinese industry of more than 13% that was reached between 1912 and 1920 also led to a post–war recession, especially in 1921–1922, when foreign, i.e. first and foremost European, competitors returned to the Asian markets.

The traditional manufacturing of handicrafts at the same time declined further "as a result of competition from both imported foreign goods and the output of Chinese– and foreign–owned modern industry in China."[29] By 1919, the output in two out of three of China's main industries – coal, cotton yarn, and cotton cloth – was still dominated by foreign firms (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Percentage of total output for China's main industries in 1919.[30]

	Chinese	Foreign
Coal Industry	24.4%	75.6%
Cotton Yarn	57%	43%
Cotton Cloth	41%	59%

Although China could claim the majority of the production with regard to cotton yarn, more than 60% of the spindles were working in Shanghai, keeping the industrial progress within an urban environment. In addition, "[t]he concentration of modern industry in coastal cities, the large foreign–owned component, the predominance of consumers' goods, and the small size and technical backwardness of most factories – all of these are correlates of the very small share of modern industry in China's national product before 1949."[31]

28 Feuerwerker, Economic Trends, pp. 41–42.

29 Ibid., p. 51. China's cotton industry and trade is discussed in Kang Chao, The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China, Cambridge, MA 1977, ch. 4–6.

30 Numbers according to Feuerwerker, Economic Trends, p. 60.

31 Ibid., p. 62.

In the republican period, the country was also suffering from its very poor transportation system that could hardly link the modernizing industrial centers in the coastal regions with the agrarian hinterland of peripheral provinces. High transportation costs made Chinese–produced coal coke and pig iron more expensive than competing products from Japanese or Western sources of production. China might have had the advantage of comparatively extremely low wages, but "[t]he wages of coolie labour were incredibly low, but the economic efficiency of the human carriers who dominated transport at the local level was even lower."[32] Between 1912 and 1927, there were only around 3,500 kilometers of railways built through China, which is not surprising when one considers that railways were early on financed through foreign capital and were often used as instruments for informal imperialism.[33] Considering that the initial wave of railway building in China between the end of the Sino–Japanese War in 1895 and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 caused the construction of more than 9,000 kilometers of track, the outcome for the first one and a half post–revolutionary decades is rather low. This lack of infrastructure had tremendous consequences on the attempts to industrialize China, since the "inland [. . .] continued to depend much more on traditional means of transport, by water and land, for local and regional carriage than it did on motor vehicles or trains."[34] During the First World War, junk tonnage would even increase before this river–related transportation method was replaced by modern steamships in the early 1920s and railway track construction intensified.[35]

Another economic problem for China was its lack of financial centralization. The republican government was unable to collect revenues on a broader scale, which is why many possible modernization–oriented measures were hard to finance and why "government policies, while not without far–reaching

32 Ibid., p. 91.

33 The best examples are probably the South Manchurian Railway or the Eastern Chinese Railway, financed by Japan and Russia respectively. Files of the Peking Legation: South Manchurian Railway, The National Archives London, Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records, FO 676/140. See also S.C.M. Paine, The Chinese Eastern Railway from the First Sino–Japanese War until the Russo–Japanese War, in: Bruce A. Elleman/Stephen Kotkin (Eds.), Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China. An International History, New York/London 2009, pp. 13–36 and Y. Tak Matsusaka, Japan's South Manchuria Railway Company in Northeast China, 1906–34, in: ibid., pp. 37–58; Mi Rucheng, Di guo zhu yi yu Zhongguo tie lu, 1847–1949, Beijing 2007; Okabe Makio (Ed.), Minami Manshū tetsudō gaisha no kenkyū, Tokyo 2008.

34 Feuerwerker, Economic Trends, p. 98.

35 Wang Yuru, Economic Development in China between the Two World Wars (1920–1936), in: Tim Wright (Ed.), The Chinese Economy in the Early Twentieth Century. Recent Chinese Studies, London 1992, pp. 58–77, here pp. 66–67.

consequences for the economy, were never realistically capable of pushing the Chinese economy forward on the path of modern economic growth."[36] After the revolution in 1911, the government struggled with the transformation of the old fiscal system, however, without being able to better control the financial resources of the country, i.e. taxes. New regulations could hardly be enforced, especially since China was becoming more and more politically fractured. The provinces remained responsible for most of the taxes, however most of the money remained in the provincial capitals, where warlords began to act according to their own political and economic agenda without paying much attention to the demands of the central government. As a consequence, foreign loans needed to fill the financial gaps and, starting in 1913, the Chinese government had to take on obligations of around US$ 270 million during the next two decades. The so-called Nishihara loans in particular, granted by Japan, also increased the Chinese dependency on Japan.[37] China was, however, not only weakened by economic problems, but also by the political factionalism that prevented a united national front against the menace of Japanese imperialism and Western jingoism during and after the war. Therefore, the reasons for the political weakness of China should also be addressed here, before the impact of the First World War is dealt with in more detail.

After the death of Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), the first president of the Chinese Republic, China would be divided between powerful warlords, eventually showing the division of the country, and was prepared by those who controlled the prefectures and would use taxes to secure their own position instead of supporting the central government. While the central government officially represented the state's power after Yuan's death in 1916, especially since no dynasty or dominant ruler existed, in reality, different families and warlords were pursuing their own goals in the provinces, waiting for their bid for power.[38] This factionalism, however, already existed before the First World War. The early republican governments were led by a generation born around 1870, who were

36 Feuerwerker, Economic Trends, p. 99.

37 Murao Hideo, The Ideas and Philosophy of Nishihara Kamezō. In the Context of His Role in the Nishihara Loans, in: Nagasaki kenritsu daigaku ronshū 30 (1997) 3, pp. 433–473; Michael Schiltz, "Separating the Roots of the Chrysanthemum". Nishihara Kamezō and the Abortive China Loans, 1917–18, (2007), MPRA Paper No. 7100 https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/7100/1/MPRA_paper_7100.pdf (3. 10. 2019); Suzuki Takeo (Ed.), Nishihara shakkan shiryō kenkyū, Tokyo 1972.

38 Andrew J. Nathan, A Constitutional Republic. The Peking Government, 1916–28, in: Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, vol. 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1, Cambridge 1983, pp. 256–283, here p. 256.

interested in securing their own position as traditional elites on the one hand, but who were also, due to their experience as students abroad at Western or Japanese universities, interested in modern forms of government and economy on the other. Sun Yat–sen (1866–1925) was also recruiting his revolutionary followers among Chinese students in Japan and at home, waiting to launch a new revolutionary attempt against the old order.[39] The revolution, however, did not create a united China, although the government in Beijing operated on the basis of the provisional constitution of 1912 from Yuan's death in 1916 until 1928. The ruling president, "elected by parliament for a five–year term, had the symbolic functions and potentially the prestige of a head of state," yet it was "his personality and factional backing [that] determined whether he could translate these into real power."[40] The cabinet, in the meantime, was usually unable to agree upon a political course because its members were supporting different factions, each of them longing for their own political goals. Only a strong president was able to at least partly rule, usually based on the control of crucial ministries, like the Ministry of Finance or Ministry of the Interior. Since essential decisions, e.g. budgets or war declarations, needed the support of parliament, it was hard to rule in the aftermath of the revolution in 1911. In 1914, China was consequently not only suffering from economic problems but also from political instability. When the Chinese government eventually declared war against Germany in 1917, it did so because it hoped to gain from such a step. Next to a better stance against Japanese imperialism, it was hoped that the prestige of being one of the victors at the peace conferences after the war would help to better position China within a new world order. Its financial dependency on Japan and foreign capital in general, as described above, however, further weakened the position of the central

39 Sun Yat–sen's relationship to Japanese right–wing pan–Asianist organizations and military representatives, who were interested in a pro–Japanese order in a possible post–revolutionary China is described in detail by Marius B. Jansen, The Japanese and Sun Yat–sen, Stanford 1970 [1954]. Some of the right–wing contacts of the Chinnese revolutionary are also discussed in detail in Frank Jacob, Japanism, Pan–Asianism, Terrorism. A Short History of the Amur Society (Black Dragons) 1901–1945, Palo Alto, CA 2014 and Frank Jacob, Die Thule–Gesellschaft und die Kokuryūkai. Geheimgesellschaften im global–historischen Vergleich, Würzburg 2013. There were, however, also pro–Chinese supporters of the revolutionary movement in Japan. For one source of such a supporter see Miyazaki Tōten, My Thirty–Three Year's Dream. The Autobiography of Miyazaki Toten, transl. and ed. by Marius B. Jansen and Etō Shinkichi, Princeton 2014. On the different varieties of pan–Asianism in Japan, see: Sven Saaler/J. Victor Koschmann (Eds.), Pan–Asianism in Modern Japanese History. Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders, London 2007.

40 Nathan, Constitutional Republic, p. 264.

government, whose constitutional role during and in the aftermath of the First World War was purely a facade.

In reality, power lay in the hands of the different factions and "personal followings, cutting across the boundaries of official institutions," wherein each faction was "centred on a particular leader and composed of his individually recruited, personally loyal followers."[41] There were several factions that had gained influence since the revolution and would struggle for influence during the war years. Some of them were military cliques, like the Zhili Clique[42] or the Fengtian Clique,[43] while others were formed by politicians or journalists, like the so–called Research Clique.[44] Regardless of such categorizations, it has to be emphasized that the larger and more successful cliques were heterogeneous with regard to their supporters and followers in parliament. The first elected parliament (1913–1914) was dissolved twice in its first three years of existence when Zhang Kun (1854–1923) proclaimed himself Prime Minister of the Imperial Cabinet in early July 1917 while trying to reinstall Emperor Puyi (1906–1967), who had abdicated.[45] Eventually, it was the Anfu Club, the political wing of the Anhui Clique, represented by Duan Qirui (1865–1936),[46] who served as Prime Minister between 1916 and 1918, that won a majority in parliament after Zhang's failed imperial restoration attempt. Of 470 seats, 342 were controlled by the Anfu Club. Due to its dominance, parliamentarian politics, at least for a while, functioned much better; this becomes obvious when considering that 1918 saw a new prime minister and cabinet in Beijing, both of whom went through the supposed process of confirmation by the Chinese parliament.[47] Nevertheless,

41 Ibid., p. 271.

42 The Zhili clique was led by General Feng Guozhang (1859–1919) and General Cao Kun (1862–1938), who also served as President of the Chinese Republic between 1923 and 1924.

43 The Fengtian clique was led by Zhang Zuolin (1875–1928), who started his career as a bandit, became warlord of Manchuria, and was eventually assassinated by officers of the Japanese Kwangtung Army. On his role in Northeast China between the revolution and his death see David Bonavia, China's Warlords, New York 1995, ch. 2; Gavan McCormack, Chang Tso–lin in Northeast China, 1911–1928. China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea, Stanford, CA 1977.

44 For a more detailed survey of factionalism in China, especially in the years after the First World War, Andrew J. Nathan, Peking Politics, 1918–1923. Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1976; Hsi–sheng Ch'i, Warlord Politics in China 1916–1928, Stanford, CA 1976 and Hatano Yoshihiro, Chūgoku kindai gunbatsu no kenkyū, Tokyo 1973 are recommended. For a short survey see Edward A. McCord, Warlordism in Early Republican China, in: David A. Graff/Robin Highman (Eds.), A Military History of China, Lexington KY, 2012, pp. 175–192.

45 Madeleine Chi, China Diplomacy 1914–1918, Cambridge, MA 1970, p. 127.

46 Duan Qirui was also provisional President of the Chinese Republic between 1924 and 1926.

47 Nathan, Constitutional Republic, p. 278.

this short period of dominance would later lead to new fractions within China's political landscape again. The protests in 1919 were consequently not only stimulated by foreign events, but also by the anger about the lack of a clear national political agenda within the parliament, where factional struggles rather than national necessities dominated political decisions. There were numerous moments during the First World War when intellectuals and students alike might have hoped for a more China–oriented political agenda by the ruling power, but eventually these hopes were disappointed, since power and influence were the main driving forces of political action within the parliament. This political weakness was also obvious to foreign observers, and Japanese military officers in particular believed that the First World War provided a good opportunity to expand the influence of Japan on the Asian mainland.[48] Japan had kept forces on the continent after the Russo–Japanese War, namely in Manchuria, where it maintained "some garrison troops [. . .] on the pretext of protecting their railways and they exerted significant military influence over Manchuria, despite China's official sovereignty in this region."[49] The First World War naturally provided Japan with an opportunity, one that not only its military leaders but also the politicians in Tokyo were willing to use to extend its influence in China. The war consequently tied both countries' ambitions to each other: while China wanted to regain its sovereignty, Japan wanted to further expand on the cost of its East Asian neighbor. Both had high expectations, triggered by the conflict, which paralyzed the West. Needless to say, the war was a watershed moment in the history of Sino–Japanese relations, as it was in both national histories. The following section will show how the war as such determined developments in East Asia.

2.3 China and the First World War

After Japan had issued an ultimatum and then declared war against Germany on 23 August 1914, China was something of an observer of the war in East Asia since Yuan Shikai and his supporters had decided to stay neutral, and had to watch as Japan occupied Shandong on 7 November 1914, taking over the imperial rule in the region from Germany.[50] As American historian Stephen G. Craft correctly

48 On the expansive policy of the Japanese military see Kitaoka Shin'ichi, Nihon rikugun to tairiku seisaku, 1906–1918, Tokyo 1978.

49 Asada Masafumi, The China–Russia–Japan Military Balance in Manchuria, 1906–1918, in: Modern Asian Studies 44, no. 6 (2010), pp. 1283–1311, here p. 1285.

50 Ian Nish, Japan and the Outbreak of War in 1914, in: The Collected Writings of Ian Nish, Vol. 1, Tokyo 2001, pp. 173–187.

evaluated, China could not do much about it: "Without a powerful army, and with the European powers preoccupied with the Western Front, China had no choice but to use diplomatic means to regain control."[51] Yuan had multiple reasons to keep China out of the war and therefore used his military power and the backing of his decision by the Western powers to suppress the voices that demanded Chinese action in 1914. One problem he had to face was the increase in the number of bandits and criminal organizations in Republican China, who, among other things, regularly kidnapped foreigners.[52] Yuan had also realized that while all the European powers were involved in the war, American support alone might not have been enough to keep Japan's imperial ambitions with regard to China in check. He consequently did not want to "waste" his power in a solely European war, leaving Chinese interests undefended. Otherwise, Yuan realized, Japan could have used the political and probably military vacuum to further extend its sphere of influence.[53] He consequently declared Chinese neutrality on 6 August 1914, demanding that the United States and Japan guarantee it. Japan, however, did not address this demand, but rather, in accordance with Great Britain, declared war against Germany. While Britain needed Japanese support, especially with regard to its battleships for control of and protection of transports in the Mediterranean Sea, the British Minister to China, John Jordan, promised Chinese diplomat V. K. Wellington Koo (1888–1985) on 19 August 1914 that the Chinese rights to Shandong, and its capital Qingdao, would be returned to China in the aftermath of the war.[54] Yuan, and with him the Chinese people, therefore "maintained an expedient, watchful neutrality, which would last until August 1917, and was prepared to give it up the moment the opportunity rose."[55]

It only took Japan two weeks to land 20,000 soldiers on the Liaodong Peninsula on 3 September 1914 in order to gain control of Qingdao and the Shandong Railway as fast as possible. The 3,000 German soldiers and 3,000 reservists who defended the Chinese possession of the German Kaiserreich did not stand a chance. Japan eventually gained control of the whole province of Shandong,

51 Stephen G. Craft, Angling for an Invitation to Paris: China's Entry into the First World War, in: The International History Review 16 (1994) 1, pp. 1–24, here p. 1.

52 On banditry in Republican China see Phil Billingsley, Bandits in Republican China, Stanford 1988; Cai Shaoqing (Ed.), Minguo shiqi de tufei, Beijing 1993. Due to the rise of the warlords in China since 1916, the number of bands of robbers would even further increase.

53 Dieter Kuhn, Die Republik China von 1912 bis 1937. Entwurf für eine politische Ereignisgeschichte, 3. überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, Heidelberg 2007, p. 146.

54 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 39.

55 Ibid., p. 40.

which was de facto transformed into a Japanese protectorate on the Asian mainland.[56] This process received relatively little attention from the European powers, who were just realizing that a fast end to the war had been a wish based on wild assumptions rather than on facts. Japan had only done what it had been longing to do since the end of the Russo–Japanese War, namely to secure its influence in Manchuria and to extend it if at all possible. During the Chinese Revolution, the government in Tokyo only feared for its possessions in China, which is why Foreign Minister Uchida Kōsai (1865–1936) and Minister to Peking Ijūin Hikokichi (1864–1924) argued in favor of support for the Qing Dynasty so as not to endanger Japan's rights in Manchuria. An unknown revolutionary government seemed less reliable than the autocrats they had been dealing with since the 1860s.[57] Agreements were signed and Japan would sell arms to the government, but at the same time, it proposed a joint military intervention in China to Britain. Yuan Shikai, using British intermediaries, would, however, eventually reach an agreement with the revolutionaries, who were holding the provinces Great Britain was mainly interested in, and a military intervention became unnecessary. In the meantime, Japanese "patriots" (*shishi*) had been sent to China by the Black Ocean Society (Gen'yōsha) and the Amur Society (Kokuryūkai), supporting the Chinese revolutionaries in the hope of gaining influence over the post–revolutionary government. Kita Ikki (1883–1937) was one of those sent on such a mission, but the revolutionary leaders realized relatively fast that these Japanese agents had a more expansionist interest and interpretation of pan–Asianism.[58] During the so–called Second Revolution against Yuan's rule by Sun Yat–sen and others like General Li Liejun (also referred to as Li Lieh–chun), Japan also granted asylum to the defeated revolutionaries, since it was unclear if their service, according to Japan's long–term goals in the region, could be

56 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 146.

57 Shinkichi Etō, China's International Relations, 1911–1931, in: John K. Fairbank/Albert Feuerwerker (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 13: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 2, Cambridge 1983, pp. 74–115, here p. 92.

58 Kita Ikki had already worked with Chinese revolutionaries in Japan before 1911, e.g. on the publication of the *Naigai jiji gekkan* (*Monthly Correspondence on Home and Abroad*). See: Ōshima Tōto, Tōyama–ō no doko ga erai ka, in Fujimoto Hisanori (Ed.), Tōyama seishin, Tokyo 1940, pp. 82–110, here p. 86; Hatsuse Ryūhei, Dentōteki uyoku. Uchida Ryōhei no kenkyū, Fukuoka 1980, p. 214. For Kita Ikki's vita see Kimura Tokio, Kita Ikki to Ni–niroku jiken no inbō Tokyo 2007, pp. 318–322; Marion Laurinat, Kita Ikki (1883–1937) und der Februarputsch 1936. Eine historische Untersuchung japanischer Quellen des Militärgerichtsverfahrens, Berlin 2006, pp. 46–48; Matsumoto Ken'ichi, Kita Ikki ron, Toyko 1996, pp. 348–359; Tanaka Sōgorō, Kita Ikki. Nihonteki fashisuto no shōchō, second edition, Tokyo 1971, pp. 427–453.

used at a later time.[59] There were also incidents related to the Second Revolution in China that riled the Japanese miliary: "the detention of a Japanese army captain, the arrest of an army second lieutenant, and acts of violence by Yuan's troops as they entered Nanking which resulted in the deaths of three Japanese."[60] The relations between the two East Asian countries were consequently already bad when the First World War opened another window for Japan to deal with the main antagonist to its claim for leadership in the region.

China had declared its neutrality and demanded "that belligerents were not to occupy or conduct warfare on Chinese soil or in Chinese territorial waters,"[61] but these claims were simply ignored by the Japanese government as it launched the above–described attack against the German possessions in Shandong. The government in Tokyo had willingly voted for the Japanese Empire to play an active role during the war, and once the territory of interest had been occupied by its troops, it would be no easy task to get it back from Japan. The military operations already showed that the Japanese military did not care for Chinese neutrality at all when the leading officers "decided to attack German fortifications from the rear, [because] to do so it would have to pass through Chinese territory and violate"[62] it. Pressured by Tokyo, the government in Beijing eventually had to take Shandong off its map of neutral territory, since Japan had presented a fait accompli in Shandong. It was clear from the beginning of the military operations by the Japanese army that Tokyo had no interest in taking just Qingdao from the Germans because, early on, railway lines and geostrategic places in the province were captured by Japan's soldiers. Once Germany had surrendered, the Japanese military just left its troops where they were to secure rule over the whole province, while China could only observe, according to its declared neutrality. The European powers, in the meantime, did not pay attention to this at all, and if they did, it was because they had their own ambitions for China that determined their non–intervention. Britain, allied with the Japanese, did not favor the larger intervention of Japan in China, but its strong presence in the northeastern provinces might have had a positive and stabilizing impact on China's central and southern provinces, where the main British interests were centered. With the pressing developments of the war in Europe, the British military planners and politicians felt a more intensive need for Japanese assistance, which is why they might simply have looked the other way. China could only rely on American help and sympathy.

59 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 94.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., p. 95.
62 Ibid.

In Japan, the situation stimulated the demands of right–wing pressure groups like the Amur Society, whose leader Uchida Ryōhei (1874–1937) declared in October 1914 that Japan had the chance to solve its Asian problems due to the absence of the European powers. He criticized the reluctant position of the Japanese government and urged the politicians in Tokyo to act in favor of a more aggressive foreign policy towards China.[63] Uchida formulated ten demands – very similar to the official Twenty–One Demands of 1915 – that requested special rights for Japan in China, including a right for military intervention. And he was correct insofar as the European powers really could not have intervened, since they "had no time or resources for Asian concerns."[64] The Chinese wish to regain control over its own territory in Shandong was eventually countered by the Twenty–One Demands, which were drafted by Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922) and Foreign Minister Katō Takaaki (1869–1926) and handed over to Yuan Shikai by the Japanese on 18 January 1915.[65] The Japanese cabinet had agreed on 14 demands, grouped into four sections, as well as on a fifth section of "wishes" on 11 November 1918. An acceptance of the Twenty–One Demands would have degraded China to the status of being a servant state to Japan. The Japanese not only demanded the German rights to Shandong, but also the acceptance of special interests in the Manchurian provinces of Liaoning and Jilin as well eastern Inner Mongolia, the elongation of leasing rights in Lushun and Dalian, including for the local railways, a joint venture between the two countries for the Hanyeping iron and steel works, and a prohibition for further concessions or lease treaties for coastal or domestic harbor towns with other states.[66] Two demands directly threatened China's sovereignty, because the Japanese demanded their own consultants for Chinese politics, economy, and finances. Furthermore, Tokyo demanded a combined police force and a joint defense industry.[67]

While Yuan was requested by the Japanese representative in Beijing, Hioki Eki (1861–1921), to keep the demands secret, they were leaked by Wellington Koo[68] who, due to his good contacts with the US Minister in China, Paul Reinsch

63 Kokuryūkai, 8 Tai–Shi mondaikaiketsu iken, 9 October 1914, Gaimushō gaikōrshiryōkan (Archive of the Foreign Ministry of Japan), B–1–1–2–156; Uchida Ryōhei, 15 Tai–Shi mondaikaiketsu iken, 29 October 1914, Gaimushō gaikōrshiryōkan, B–1–1–2–151.

64 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 96.

65 For a detailed description of the initial demands see ibid., pp. 98–99; Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 40.

66 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 147.

67 Ibid.

68 For Koo's vita see Stephen G. Craft, V.K. Wellington Koo and the Emergence of Modern China, Lexington, KY 2003.

(1869–1923), hoped for support from the Americans. Yuan, in contrast, dealt directly with the Japanese politicians in more than 40 negotiation meetings, and after 84 days, a revised version of the initial demands was finally presented. Regardless of the negotiations, when the international press, like *The Times* of London, reported the Japanese demands, the wider public opinion in the West, as far as it was concerned with the events and developments in the Far East, expressed sympathy for the Chinese.

In the end, Tokyo had to abandon the fifth group of its demands, since these would have transformed China into a Japanese protectorate, but still, the acceptance of the first four groups would have been a humiliation for the Chinese, who had initially hoped to regain their own territory but instead had to accept further political degradation by the Japanese.[69] The fact that Yuan eventually agreed upon a final, much–diffused version of the demands, however, further separated him from revolutionaries like Sun Yat–sen who, in contrast to Yuan, did not consider the final agreement a Chinese success, but treason.[70] With its aggressive policy, Japan now left no doubts about its aims in East Asia and lost some of its prestige, especially since the political procedure was almost amateur–like. Etō Shinkichi's overall evaluation should therefore be quoted here in some detail:

> What was distinctive about the demands was the insensitivity and clumsiness of Japanese diplomacy. The world, and especially America, saw a crafty Japan taking advantage of its weaker neighbour at a time when the Western powers were preoccupied elsewhere. Japanese diplomats, by requesting secrecy, enabled Chinese statesmen to build up alarm and distrust by leaking the contents of supposedly non–existent demands. The final ultimatum served on Yuan Shih–k'ai in May 1915 completed the picture of Japanese insensitivity. It gained Japan little the Chinese had not already agreed to, and provided the symbolism for what became, each 25 May, a Day of National Humiliation.[71]

The acceptance of the demands by China could consequently only be considered to be a "Pyrrhic victory,"[72] and it was not only the American public that began to look at Japan more critically. During the negotiations, China also was shaken by a first wave of anti–Japanese resentment when more than 40,000 demonstrators assembled in Shanghai in March 1915 to protest against the Twenty–One Demands, because intellectuals like Liang Qichao (1873–1929) had criticized the content of the demands and warned the government as well as the people that

69 Etō, China's International Relations, pp. 97–99.
70 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 148.
71 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 99.
72 Ibid., p. 100.

Japan was trying to turn China into a second Korea.[73] Anti–Japanese protests took place in most of the larger Chinese cities – like Shanghai, Beijing, Shenyang or Hankow – where students went on strike, held protest meetings, organized rallies and delivered pamphlets and leaflets to the wider public, and where merchants organized a boycott against Japanese products. The government, in the meantime, decided to suppress these protests, as they were considered to be acting against the rule of Yuan Shikai, and violence was used to force the protesters to dissolve.[74] Mao Zedong not only realized in 1915 that "Japan is a powerful enemy," but he also concluded that China as a nation "could not survive without fighting in the next twenty years."[75] The people who remembered the national humiliation by Japan 20 years before, when China had been defeated in the First Sino–Japanese War, were now being challenged again by Japanese imperialism. The students, who had considered Japan to be a successful example of Asian modernization, were disappointed and now realized that the Japanese government had no real interest in solidarity with its neighbors, but rather wanted to replace the Western imperialist powers as the leader of East Asia. This knowledge stimulated a wave of nationalism in China, which, however, was not exclusively related to the foreign menace.

China's leaders, due to the Japanese bid for expansion, also realized that they needed to try to counter the imperialist behavior of their neighbor and tried to link their own aims with the Allies, who were still struggling to decide the war in Europe. Britain had had an interest in China's participation in the war, but the Japanese government had declared its reservations, especially since a stronger Chinese voice within the international community was against the natural interests of Japan. Due to the Japanese reservations, Britain eventually decided against negotiating with China about its participation in the war.[76] The war, however, transformed the British Empire into a rather unfelt presence in China, where its activities decreased, and eventually Britain was reduced to a minor power in East Asia when Japan took over its political and economic might in the region.[77]

73 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 40.

74 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 148.

75 Mao to Xiao Zisheng, 25 July 1916, in: Stuart R. Schram (Ed.), Mao's Road to Power. Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949, Armonk, NY 1992, Vol. 1, p. 103, cited in Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 41.

76 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 100.

77 Clarence B. Davis, Limits of Effacement. Britain and the Problem of American Cooperation and Competitionin China, 1915–1917, in: Pacific Historical Review 48 (1979) 1, pp. 47–63, here p. 47. For two studies about the Anglo–Japanese relations during and after the First World War see Peter Lowe, Great Britain and Japan, 1911–1915. A Study of British Far Eastern Policy,

Regardless of these developments, the British government kept its pro–Japanese stance and did not criticize its East Asian ally either for the Twenty–One Demands or for its aggressive policy in Shandong. Actually, only a few officials in the Far Eastern Department were worried about the developments in China, but their voices could hardly be heard during the loud and heated debates about the Western Front. That the Japanese had shown that they considered the British as their rivals in East Asia since the Chinese Revolution in 1911 seemed to be unimportant during the war, due to which the British Empire needed to tighten all its muscles and activate all its allies, no matter how avaricious they may have been.[78] Even America's attempts, namely by Paul Reinsch as well as Edward T. Williams (1854–1944),[79] who led the US State Department's Far Eastern Division, and President Woodrow Wilson himself, could not persuade the British to be more aware of their East Asian ally. However, once the details of Japan's demands had been leaked, Britain also put diplomatic pressure on the government in Tokyo, although the Chinese Minister in London, Alfred Sao–ke Sze (1877–1958),[80] was informed by Foreign Minister Edward Grey (1862–1933) that the British government recommended the acceptance of the final version of the Japanese demands.

Regardless of his position, Yuan Shikai did not seem too concerned by his lack of allies against Japan, especially since he, as mentioned before, considered the final version of the demands of the Japanese government a success of his long negotiations. In fact, Yuan was rather more interested in internal matters, since he was trying to overcome China's post–revolutionary republican order. He was trying to reestablish the monarchy in China and longed for himself to be the first post–revolutionary emperor of the country.[81] His plans, however, met resistance, even from former supporters. Liang Qichao, who had supported Yuan in the past, began to publicly criticize his bid for a reinstallation of the monarchy and was supported by some of the military leaders who had supported Yuan in the past but were, however, unwilling to serve him in the role of a Chinese Emperor. On 11 December 1915, Yuan's preparations were

New York 1969 and Ian Nish, Alliance in Decline. A Study in Anglo–Japanese Relations, 1908–1923, London 1972.

78 Davis, Limits of Effacement, p. 50.

79 Williams' letters related to "Chinese problems" can be found in Box 1 of the Edward Thomas Williams Papers at the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. For his later involvement in the peace talks in Paris, see his diary, Carton 3, Vol. 7.

80 Ian Nish, Japan and China, 1914–1916, in: F. Harry Hinsley (Ed.), British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey, Cambridge 1977, pp. 452–465.

81 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 149.

finished and a process began that would lead to further fractions within Chinese politics. The Deputy Council for Legislation (*daixing lifayuan*) requested Yuan to take on the throne and the title of Emperor, but the general declined the offer. When asked for a second time on 13 December 1915, Yuan agreed and declared that he would reign the country as its new emperor under the maxim "great constitution" (*hongxian*), beginning on 1 January 1916. Two weeks after these events, Cai E (1882–1916), a disciple of Liang and the former military governor of Yunnan Province, established the National Protection Army (*huguojun*) and declared Yunnan's independence.[82] Other military leaders followed Cai's lead and also revolted against the self–proclaimed emperor.

The revolt in Yunnan prevented Yuan Shikai from following his original plan, and he postponed his inthronization until 9 February 1916, but the antagonism against his person in the south of China clearly showed that he would be unable to keep the power for himself. His decline had begun. Yuan was internally and externally isolated, unable to gain any valuable support for his claim, which is why he eventually had to abandon his ideas and the throne itself. On 22 March 1916, Yuan officially renounced his claim.[83] Regardless of the end of the ambitious imperial plans of the formerly mightiest military leader in China, the break up of the provinces and the growing power of individual generals was irreversible. In early April 1916, Guangdong declared its independence from Beijing, and other provinces would follow. Duan Qirui, who as Prime Minister had been summoned to the capital to try to solve this crisis, was also unable to repair the damage that had been done to the country by the ambitions of Yuan. The latter had laid the foundations for the era of the warlords, who would determine the fate of the Chinese republics in the years to come until Chiang Kai–shek (1887–1975) began his rule in 1928, though this was not fully uncontested by the continuing existence of autonomous warlords. Duan did, however, keep control in northern China, where he ruled the remains of the Beiyang government, while the south, the southwest, and the northeast were held by powerful military leaders. The Japanese had stimulated these developments in northern China as well when they supported a Manchu–Mongol movement that longed for independence from the republic. Japan's foreign ministry had supported this movement, but when Yuan eventually died on 6 June 1916, it withdrew its support since China had been weakened already and no additional separatist movement was needed to weaken the central government further. After Yuan's death, the Japanese changed

82 Xie Benshu, Cai E yu minchu zhengju, in: Shehui kexue zhanxian 6 (1996), pp. 220–226, cited in ibid., p. 150.
83 Ibid., pp. 150–151.

their tactics with regard to their foreign policy, and when Ōkuma Shigenobu was replaced as Prime Minister by Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919) in October 1916, the latter, together with the new foreign minister, Motono Ichirō (1862–1918), attempted to gain influence over the new Chinese cabinet by sending a personal envoy to Beijing, namely the businessman Nishihara Kamezo (1873–1954), who would initiate the so–called Nishihara Loans, a form of indirect imperialism that would achieve what the Twenty–One Demands could not.[84]

The death of Yuan, however, also created another opportunity for China to gain some more weight in the international theater, because the opponents against the active involvement of the Chinese Republic in the First World War could no longer resist the urge felt by so many of his fellow politicians. Since 1915 a scheme had been worked out, according to which China would provide labor for the war in Europe. According to the motto "laborers in place of soldiers" (*yigong daibing*),[85] Beijing was willing to support the war effort of the allied powers with human capital. After Yuan Shikai's death, the way was clear for laborers to go to Europe, and "his successors feuded with each other but managed to provide ca. 150,000 laborers,[86] who worked on the Western Front during the war."[87] China thereby sent a number of working men to Europe, surpassing the number of involved civilians of any other country. When the British Legation in Beijing requested support and demanded that British missionaries could recruit men in north China for the Chinese Labor Corps, it was clear that the Chinese government would eventually participate in the war and could hope for better treatment once the enemy in Europe had been defeated. A lot of laborers, however, would be sent to France as well. It is ironic that a French ship with Chinese workers was sunk on its way to Europe in February 1917, not only causing 542 deaths among the workers, but also leading to a further request by the Allies to the Japanese government, demanding support from its navy for protection against German submarines. Japan, on the other hand, used this request to demand the former German possessions in China and the Pacific above the equator, something that was secretly granted by Britain, France, Russia, and Italy.[88] While China was still recruiting and sending its workers to

84 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 101.

85 On this strategy see Xu, Asia and the Great War, pp. 45–48.

86 Xu claims a number of 140,000 laborers, Wang speaks of 175,000. Peter Chen–main Wang, Caring beyond National Borders. The YMCA and Chinese Laborers in World War I Europe, in: Church History 78 (2009) 2, pp. 327–349, here p. 327.

87 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 45.

88 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 101.

foreign countries, its hopes to thereby regain its sovereignty as a state could already never be fulfilled.

As such, recruitment was not an easy task for the foreign missionaries. Most of the laborers were illiterate and had never even heard of the countries they were supposed to be working for or sent to. The British missionaries, who were able to use the Chinese language and were accustomed to China's culture, were obviously helping with the progress, but the involvement of the Chinese government during the process to ensure its successful operation seemed to be inevitable.[89] In Europe, the workers were eventually housed in camps that were provided and run by the British, French, and American militaries (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Chinese Labor Camps on the Western Front.[90]

	French organization	British organization	American organization
Number of camps	87	23	10
Size of camps	25–2,000 men	7 camps of more than 3000 men Other camps with 100–1,000 men	Ca. 1,500 men in each camp

Contractually, the Chinese workers had a right to food, clothing, and a salary, but the contractual agreement was obviously not kept in every camp, which is why conflicts between the men and their military supervisors occurred early on. While the laborers from China were allowed to move around their new environment freely and even to travel to other cities, if the required documents had been obtained before, the foreign workers were also confronted with racism and jingoism from the Western soldiers.[91] Eventually, however, China not only benefitted economically from sending workers to Europe but also through exports, e.g. rifles that were secretly sent to the British through Hong Kong. In

89 Wang, Caring beyond National Borders, p. 330.

90 Data according to ibid., p. 332. For a more detailed analysis of the role of the Chinese Labor Corps on the Western Front, see: Xu Guoqi, Strangers on the Western Front. Chinese Workers in the Great War, Cambridge, MA 2011 and Alex Calvo/Bao Qiaoni, Forgotten Voices from the Great War. The Chinese Labour Corps, in: The Asia–Pacific Journal 13 (2015) 1, http://apjjf.org/-Bao-Qiaoni–Alex-Calvo/4411/article.pdf (30. 9. 2019).

91 Michael Summerskill, China on the Western Front. Britain's Chinese Work Force in the First World War, London 1982 provides a more detailed account for those Chinese laborers, who worked under British surveillance.

contrast to Japan, whose government and businesses gained immense surpluses during the war, no long–lasting or major impact could be seen in China. The government in Beijing, especially due to its political problems, needed money, and Japan seemed to be the only option to hand.

Nishihara had arranged a first loan to the Chinese government in January 1917, due to which Duan's government was receiving five million Yen in gold.[92] These loans were funneled through Zhang Zuolin, who ruled in the northeast of the country. Due to the incoming money, Duan was able to keep his allies around him, namely Zhang and the conservatives of the Chinese Republic, represented in the national assembly. The revolutionaries, gathered around Sun Yat–sen, in the meantime opposed the Chinese participation in the war, fearing that it would further strengthen the position of the current government. The Japanese eventually decided to put their lot in with Duan's rule and centered their loan policy on his person, abolishing any support for the revolutionaries in the south, who had been traditionally supported through existent pan–Asianist connections. This, in the end, created a political schism, because Duan's opponents, i.e. more than 130 members of the national assembly, met in Guangzhou (Canton) in August 1917, where they elected Sun as the new leader of a southern military government.[93] Between 1917 and 1918 the northern government therefore received further eight Nishihara loans – a total of 145 million Yen – that were supposed to strengthen Duan's position against his enemies, but which also stimulated nationalist and anti–Japanese feelings among the population, who felt betrayed and sold out to a foreign power. It was, however, not solely the corruption of the government but also, and especially, the dissolution of China, which was becoming more and more divided among warlords, that would eventually stimulate the protests of 1919. Accordingly, the early warlord period from 1916,[94] as one of the long–term reasons for the national upheaval after the First World War, should be discussed in a bit more detail, after which the occasion for the protests in 1919, i.e. the Chinese attempts at Versailles to be treated as an equal by the other great powers, will be thoroughly analyzed.

The warlord period determined China's further political development and, in a way, prevented it from taking a united stand against the Japanese imperialist

92 Etō, China's International Relations, p. 101.

93 Ibid., p. 102.

94 The description will, if not explicitly stated otherwise, follow James E. Sheridan, The Warlord Era. Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916–28, in: Denis Twitchett/John K. Fairbank (Eds.), The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 1, Cambridge 1983, pp. 284–321.

menace, especially during the second half and the aftermath of the First World War. A warlord is usually considered as someone "who commanded a personal army, controlled or sought to control territory, and acted more or less independently,"[95] but the group of these men, who determined China's political fate, was very heterogeneous. Some might have started their career in the military, others as bandits, and their values and motives were definitely as different as the characters themselves. There were hundreds of warlords in China and only some of them, especially the ones who ruled larger territories, have been intensely studied so far. Controlling their own armies, they were first and foremost trying to expand their own influence, looking for allies if necessary, but then suppressing them if possible. Chinese politics between 1916 and 1928 consequently offers a rich field for Machiavellian studies, as power was the only motive for these "princes," who obviously did not identify with the Chinese nation and the vision of a strong nation state in the region.

For the warlords, there existed no national community, imagined or real,[96] but they considered other ties as valuable, namely family ties, which is why many of them tried to install their own family members in key military or political positions. In addition, marriages continued to be used as a political instrument, while personal bonds between officers and their military subordinates would also help to strengthen the position of the warlords. If they wanted to remain in control, the warlords needed to control territory, because revenue secured loyalty within their private armies. Without territory, the army would dissolve and the warlord would consequently lose his position at the top of the province he controlled. Naturally, a helix of violence and attempted expansion by the warlords to increase their own power by increasing their army and the territory they controlled was the consequence of these simple interrelations between possession and rule. For the common people, this helix, however, created actual problems, especially when they were living in a contested area. There, different warlords might have claimed possession of the territory and demanded tax payments at the same time. The loyalty of his subordinates was the most important but also, at the same time, the most expensive asset of a warlord. In addition, a steady supply of weapons, ammunition, and other military goods was necessary, next to the payments for food and other necessary supplies. Since it

95 Ibid., p. 284. On the warlord definition and related questions see also Harold Z. Schiffrin, Military and Politics in China. Is the Warlord Model Pertinent?, in: Asia Quarterly 3 (1975), p. 195 and Arthur Waldron, The Warlord. Twentieth–Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism, in: The American Historical Review 96 (1991) 4, pp. 1073–1100.

96 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, revised edition, New York 1998 [1991].

was not certain that the occupied territories would still belong to them in the near future, most warlords tended to try everything to financially drain the occupied regions as far as possible. In addition to taxes, successful businessmen in particular would draw the attention of a warlord, as they promised to provide exactly what the military leaders were looking for: easy money. Loyalty to the different cliques was also almost always negotiable, depending on the cui bono of the moment. Some warlords had rather loose ties with other cliques or other generals, while some had developed closer relations, usually fortified by a common enemy. The Anhui, Zhili and Fengtian cliques dominated the early warlord period. The warlords, like Zhang Zuolin, could have had very interesting biographies, and like the condottieri of earlier times, they rose to power through opportunity, pure will, and an acceptance of the violent deaths of those who opposed their own ambition for power. Once in power, some of the warlords were successful in expanding their local rule into the riparian territories. Once they had occupied larger territories and could claim rule their uncontestedly, they became a nationally important factor and were able to counter the interests of the government in Beijing in the region. The warlord period was consequently a very violent episode in Chinese history, because it was determined by hundreds of smaller and larger conflicts between single warlords or different cliques. They might have fought for influence in a whole province, but there were also smaller battles for geostrategically important spots or due to specific economic interests. While "China was nominally a republic, with a parliament, a premier, a president, political parties and elections,"[97] nothing could be done in most parts of the country without the consent of a warlord.

Politically the warlords' positions were also very diverse. Yan Xishan (1883–1960), who controlled Shanxi Province, was a modernizer, while Zhang Xun (1854–1923) was interested in the re–establishment of a Chinese Dynasty. There were of course other political forces in the years between 1916 and 1928, like the republican government in Beijing, the intellectuals and their agenda for modern education, new political forces based on the impact of Marxism–Leninism, especially since the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the students and workers who protested against a growing Japanese influence on China's politics, but they were all unable to overcome the rule of the warlords and were consequently in some way dependent on their decisions. The warlords were eventually responsible for a fragile China, where the political structure remained republican but where, in twelve years, one can count four presidents and, depending on the counting

97 Elisabeth Forster, 1919 – The Year That Changed China. A New History of the New Culture Movement, Berlin/Boston 2018.

method, 25 to 45 cabinets, as well as seven different constitutions.[98] In these years, 26 people served as prime minister, with terms ranging from two days to 17 months. More than 90 ministers were part of the different governments, in which the south dominated overall by a ratio of 2:1. The nationalists and the communists alike would later refer to the warlords as a junta, a term that emphasized the egocentric aspect of their politics, which was irresponsible and in no way interested in the needs and sorrows of the ordinary people.[99] The rise of the warlords went hand in hand with increasing criminality, as bandits and other criminal organizations often cooperated with the new military rulers or were even incorporated into their armies. Many common people, i.e. civilians, were also victims of the violent conflicts between the 1,300 warlords, who waged around 140 small–scale wars within or between different provinces. The civilian death count has been estimated at more than 600,000 people. None of these wars was waged to reunite China under one political leadership, but rather for the profit and territorial expansion of the warlords.[100]

The steady wars between China's military rulers increased the demand for soldiers, arms and ammunition, as well as war–related supplies, while more and more provinces were drawn into these violent conflicts (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: War–related increases in soldiers between 1916 and 1928.[101]

Year	Soldiers in China	Provinces involved in conflicts between the warlords
1911	570,000	
1916	700,000	
1918	850,000	1
1919	940,000	
1920		3
1922	1,050,000	
1924		5
1925/26	1,470,000	12
1928	1,830,000	12

The permanent need to arm larger forces stimulated an arms trade with the foreign powers, who exported weapons to China. In addition, the warlords tried to establish their own arms production facilities in larger cities like Shanghai or

98 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 164.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., pp. 164–165.
101 Data according to ibid., p. 166 and Ch'i, Warlord Politics, p. 137.

Wuhan, from where their troops would be supplied with firepower. Due to these industrial structures, Chinese logistics were also improved, although an overall economic increase was prevented by the violent destruction wrought by the wars between the single bidders for power. It was first and foremost Britain and Japan that exported infantry rifles and other weapons to China and therefore gained from the warlords twice over. Not only were they paid for the arms, but they also used them to keep the country politically unstable, a factor that was quite useful for the imperialist interests of the two exporting powers. As well as rifles, the warlords also imported artillery and were able to count close to 1,500 field guns in 1918. Compared to the Western powers, the provision of field guns or machine guns was still rather sparse, however, because there was only one of them for every 1,000 soldiers.[102]

Regardless of the lack of unity and the further division of large parts of the country among several mighty warlords, the Chinese government, led by President Li Yuanhong (1864–1928), who had taken over that position after Yuan Shikai's death, and Prime Minister Duan Qirui, discussed China's possible participation in the First World War to secure its interests in the aftermath of the global conflict.[103] After heated internal discussions and negotiations with the United States, who had given China some hope of regaining its territory after the war, i.e. Shandong Province, the Chinese government declared war against Germany on 14 August 1917. This happened after a debate that had lasted five months, but the internal struggles in China did not end with the declaration. Members of the revolutionary party, i.e. the Guomindang (Nationalist Party of China), including its leader Sun Yat–sen, opposed China's participation in the war, since they also realized that Duan intended to use it to strengthen his own position further. The country was more divided than others, and, due to the secret agreements between Japan and the other allies, had no chance of regaining its territorial rights anyway.

Regardless of China's willingness to participate in the war effort of the Allied Powers, it was hardly necessary to send troops to Europe, since the Chinese soldiers were not well equipped enough and the Western powers were rather uninterested in a military contribution, but they appreciated, as mentioned above, the support of laborers from China, who could be used for the logistics related to the war effort on the Western Front. In mid–1918, therefore, between 140,000 and 200,000 workers represented China's contribution to the Allied victory. Among them were also close to 30,000 students and other intellectuals,

102 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 166–167.
103 Craft, Angling for an Invitation, p. 1.

who came into contact with socialist and communist ideas, which they would spread at home after their return in the 1920s.[104] In the meantime, in China, the national turmoil intensified more and more. Parliament, which had been dissolved in June 1917, was not summoned again. Instead, Duan Qirui continued to extend his own power. Many members of parliament, as already mentioned above, eventually fled to the south, where they supported Sun Yat–sen, who established, backed by the Chinese Navy, a military government in Guangzhou (Canton) in September 1917. Sun and his supporters claimed to protect the constitution of 1912, but the existence of two governments would make it difficult for China to demand something from the other Allied Powers in the aftermath of the war. A disunited nation state could hardly demand anything from the West. Sun could not remain in his leading position for very long and had to abandon it in early May 1918, but the north–south division of China had been intensified by his actions and a united front against Japanese and Western imperialism was impossible.[105]

The political schism had also intensified the dependency of Duan Qirui on Tokyo's financial support and opened the door for an economic form of Japanese imperialism. He needed money for the military operations of the Anhui clique and therefore was responsive to the offer of the Nishihara loans, which, on the other hand, further increased Japan's control over the political fate of China. 40 million Yen would be used to modernize the military and the banking system of the country, as well as the development of a phone and telegraph network, 30 million Yen were supposed to be invested in mining and forestry, and likewise 50 million Yen for the railway networks in Manchuria and Shandong, which would have supplied the Japanese with another tool with which to strengthen their grip in these regions. Japan, in exchange, received guarantees that were related to Chinese natural resources as well as special trading rights in the country. The loans made Duan's position particularly strong and he was politically uncontested in fall 1918, but he had sold out China's integrity to gain such a powerful rule.[106] Japan had supported Duan's rise to power since 1916, when the government in Tokyo had "launched a policy of full support to [his] government [. . .]

104 Some of the students also remained in France, some Chinese arrived after leaving China after the May Fourth Protests. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) was one of those, active in France in the 1920s, before later becoming influential within the communist movement in China. Chae–jin Lee, Zhou Enlai. The Early Years, Stanford 1994, pp. 75–117; Han Suyin, Eldest Son. Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China, 1898–1976, New York 1995, pp. 50–62.

105 On Sun's southern government see Marie–Claire Bergère, Sun Yat–Sen, trans. Janet Lloyd, Stanford 1998, pp. 270–273.

106 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 174–175.

to establish close ties of political and economic cooperation, and financial obligation between China and Japan."[107] The Japanese government had realized that an informal empire would secure its interests much better than open and aggressive demands, which had failed in 1915. The money invested in military training and modernization, of course, did not serve the war effort of China as a member of the Entente Powers in the First World War, but was rather used to suppress internal enemies of Duan's government. The Japanese consequently perfectly understood how to exploit the internal turmoil in China and to use money where diplomatic pressure had failed in the past. At the same time, the government in Tokyo tried to gain exclusive influence in northeast China by supporting Zhang Zuolin:

> While the imperial government is not unwilling to give friendly consideration to financial aid according to circumstances, it is important to do so by means of economic loans, especially by adopting the form of investment in joint enterprises, in order to avoid the suspicion of the powers and the jealousy of the central government. If [Zhang] too will strive increasingly to promote the reality of Sino-Japanese cooperation, exerting himself, for example, in relation to the lease of land, the management of mines and forests, and other such promising enterprises, and if he will apply every effort to implementing the principles of so–called coexistence and coprosperity and devise methods of joint control both in already existing and in newly-to-be-set-up Sino-Japanese joint venture companies, then the finances of the Three Eastern Provinces can be made to flourish of their own accord and in an inconspicuous way.[108]

It was China's political instability, the rivalry of the warlords, and the lack of a truly national agenda that made it easy for Japan to economically infiltrate the country, to use its leaders as puppets for its own agenda, and to not waste any doubts on its position within China related to the peace conferences after the First World War. Japan was uncontested, since the one and only Chinese government as such did not exist and, since Tokyo had already secretly prepared its territorial gains for the aftermath of the war, it could simply wait to harvest the fruits of its long–term strategy in East Asia.

The philosopher and founding member of the Communist Party of China, Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), would argue in an article on the foundations for the realization of democracy ("Shixing minzhu de jichu", 1 December 1919) that the reasons for the failure of the republic were diverse:

107 Sheridan, Warlord Era, p. 304.
108 Gaimushō, Nihon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō monjo, Vol. 1, p. 525, cited in ibid., p. 305.

1) The Republic of China is still young.
2) The revolutionaries underestimated the problems related to the foundation of a republic.
3) The warlords control the military in China.
4) The parties do not understand the true nature of democracy.

Chen also criticized the fact that the people were not involved in Chinese politics, as the country was ruled by bureaucrats, not by true representatives of the people.[109] The peace negotiations at Versailles and the failure of the delegation to secure Chinese interests, however, would eventually lead to a first national outcry in China and would stimulate the genesis of a first national movement and the discussion about the nation state's political fate in the aftermath of the First World War.

2.4 China at Versailles

Recent publications have dealt with the Treaty of Versailles and its political shortcomings, and the German historian Jörn Leonhard correctly called it a "global epochal threshold" ("*Globale Epochenschwelle*").[110] For China, the trip of its delegation to France would end with another national trauma that would mark the direct cause for the May Fourth Movement. While the members of the Chinese delegation had to counter only one imperialist antagonist, namely Japan, because the Czarist Empire had fallen victim to the Russian Revolution, and the Bolshevists were not represented in Paris but would deal with China in bilateral treaties later,[111] it was from the beginning no easy task for the government in Beijing to reach its aims. Ge–Zay Wood, who had published an analysis of the Sino–Japanese conflict in 1919 for the Chinese Patriotic Committee in New York, highlighted that "[t]he arrival of peace in Europe has lifted the velvet curtain on the Far East which has been hidden behind the scene of world

109 The text can be found in Hans J. van de Ven, From Friend to Comrade. The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927, Berkeley 1991, pp. 19–20, and is also cited in Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 151–152.

110 Jörn Leonhard, Der überforderte Frieden. Versailles und die Welt 1918–1923, Munich 2018, p. 1254. Also see Eckart Conze, Die große Illusion. Versailles 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt, Munich 2018.

111 Allen S. Whiting, The Soviet Offer to China of 1919, in: The Far Eastern Quarterly 10 (1951) 4, pp. 355–364.

politics for the last four years of war."[112] The Chinese author made it clear that the peace conference would not only determine the future fate of Europe, but would have a tremendous impact on East Asia as well:

> The war in Europe has come to an end. It is high time to consider, not only peace in Europe, but peace in the whole world. The war is a world war, and the problem of peace is certainly and necessarily a world problem. Now can this problem be solved with any satisfaction without rightly settling the Far Eastern question? Can the world have peace while China is every day threatened with War [sic!]?[113]

For Wang, it was also clear that "the Far Eastern is essentially a [S]ino–Japanese question"[114] and that China's treatment during the peace conference would decide the fate of the whole region.

A lot of Chinese hoped that the peace negotiations in France would provide opportunities to regain the territorial rights to Shandong Province and to overturn some of the Twenty–One Demands that had had to be accepted by the government of Yuan Shikai in 1915. There was unity about these goals and a political compromise between the northern and southern governments of China was achieved, due to which they would send a shared delegation led by Lu Zhengxiang (1871–1940) for the north and Wang Zhengting (1882–1961) for the south. The conference in Paris was the first international one that China attended, and Wellington Koo used the opportunity there to give a speech that emphasized the Chinese interest in a new world order that would supposedly follow the ideals US President Woodrow Wilson had spread during the First World War. Regardless of the hopes in China that were also shared by some of its delegates, the East Asian nation state did not receive equal treatment and the Chinese government was not considered to represent one of the victorious Allied Powers, but was considered an inferior participant in the peace talks. This position towards China was influenced by jingoist stereotypes, which were shared by many British diplomats, to name just one example, like Edward T.C. Werner, who wrote about his experiences in the consular service and as a Sinologist in 1920. In his work *China and the Chinese*, he provided a negative image of the Chinese people:

> Emotionally the Chinese are mild, frugal, sober, gregarious, industrious, of remarkable endurance, but at the same time cowardly, revengeful, very cruel, unsympathetic, mendacious, thievish, and libidinous. They are taciturn, but spasmodically vehement. [. . .] Intellectually the Chinese are non–progressive; though in modern times some have shown a desire for Western learning, most have always been and still are slaves to uniformity and

112 Ge–Zay Wood, China Versus Japan, New York 1919, p. 3.
113 Ibid., p. 7.
114 Ibid., p. 9.

> mechanism in culture. They are unimaginative, imitative, lacking free individuality and creative power, slow in organizing, lacking reflection and foresight, vague in expression, unable to take a comprehensive grasp of a subject; they attach little importance to accuracy. They are also exceedingly suspicious and superstitious.[115]

The Chinese delegation soon realized that many Western diplomats had similar views about China and that they would not receive equal treatment. Eventually, they failed, like Japan failed in its attempt to be considered equal by the Western allies. However, Japan was important enough to secure its territorial interests in Paris, while "Chinese diplomats rallied their meager resources but were ignored in their efforts to recover what had been taken from China."[116]

For the British delegation, it was clear from the beginning that Japan would not accept less than the German rights to Shandong, which, as mentioned before, had been secured in secret agreements with the Western allies already. The Japanese press, as observed by the British Foreign Office, had also made clear the main points of interest:

1. Questions in Europe were not the concern of Japan.
2. Qingdao must not be returned to Germans but the question of its future disposal must be settled directly between China and Japan.
3. If Great Britain retains the South Sea Islands south of the equator, Japan would certainly want to retain those to the north.
4. Japan would have something to say as regards the settlement in Eastern Siberia.
5. The question of discrimination against the Japanese in America, Canada, and Australia would appear likely to be brought up at the Conference as arising out of the proposal for a League of Nations.[117]

To avoid discussions about racism and Japanese immigration to the British dominions, London might also have been in favor of letting Japan take its stand against China. The Chinese rights for self-determination and territorial integrity were consequently sacrificed for the interests of the British Empire as a whole. Since the Japanese "came to Paris with three demands: first, a formal recognition of the principle of racial equality; second, title to the German islands of the North Pacific; and third, acquisition of Germany's economic and other rights in the Chinese province of Shandong,"[118] it was clear that not all of them could be denied.

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115 Edward T.C. Werner, China of the Chinese, London 1920, pp. 7–8.
116 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 153.
117 British Embassy, Tokyo to Balfour, November 12, 1918, FO 608/211, cited in ibid., p.155.
118 Ibid., p. 157.

The American position towards the Chinese was not as bad as the British one, but only because the US diplomats distrusted the Japanese, as they were competing with them over economic interests in the Pacific region in general, and in China in particular. Robert Lansing (1864–1928), a member of the US delegation, even compared Japan with Germany, with the former claiming a position for itself in East Asia as Germany had claimed in Europe. The Japanese expansionist demands as such consequently represented a threat to the new liberal and peaceful order that Wilson had not only recommended but requested to secure peace after the war.[119] The Japanese delegation, however, pressed for the rights to Shandong, and even threatened on 24 and 30 April 1919 not to sign the peace treaty at all. Furthermore, they would not only withdraw from the conference, but also from the League of Nations and thereby sabotage Wilson's project of a new international and peaceful order from its beginning. As Xu remarked, the US President's "dilemma was this: if he gave Shandong to Japan, China might not vote for the League; if he gave Shandong to China, Japan would not vote for the League."[120] In the end, China's national division and lack of international recognition as a worthy and powerful ally in East Asia were responsible for the final swing towards Japan. Since Italy had already left the peace talks due to its claims for Fiume, Wilson could not afford another power leaving, because "the defection of Japan might well break up the conference and destroy the League of Nations."[121] Considering the later problems the League of Nations had to face in the United States, as well as with Japan in its more aggressive and expansionist period, one could critically ask if its establishment was worth the sacrifice of Chinese interests in Versailles.[122] Regardless of the future developments, China had to live with the new facts, despite the hopes for a better and more equal world to live in having been so high in the East Asian country.

When the war in Europe ended, the people in China were happy to read news about the allied victory in the war against the Central Powers. An official national holiday was declared by the government, and three days off work did their part in cheering up the common people. When it became known that Wilson would be in Paris to negotiate over the new world order, people across the

119 For Lansing's memoirs of the peace talks see Robert Lansing, Die Versailler Friedensverhandlungen. Persönliche Erinnerungen, Berlin 1921.

120 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 159.

121 Ibid., p. 160.

122 On Japan and the League of Nations see Thomas W. Burkman, Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938, Honolulu, HI 2007. For the Chinese relations to the League see Alison Adcock Kaufman, In Pursuit of Equality and Respect. China's Diplomacy and the League of Nations, in: Modern China 40 (2014) 6, pp. 605–638.

country cheered, because they were hoping for the US President's success at the green table. The mood in the capital was good, and especially the students were full of hope:

> Chinese students in Beijing gathered at the American Legation, where they chanted 'Long live President Wilson!' Some of them had memorized and could easily recite his speech on the Fourteen Points. Chen Duxiu, Dean of the School of Letters at Peking University, a leading figure in the New Cultural Movement, and later a co–founder of the Chinese Communist Party, was then so convinced of Wilson's sincerity and noble objectives that he called Wilson 'the best good man in the world.'[123]

The intellectuals, like Cai Yuanpei, connected Wilson's ideas and the end of the war with a watershed moment in history, since the future seemed brighter and the League of Nations promised peace, based on the self–determination of nations and an international sister– and brotherhood of human beings. In Beijing, more than 50,000 people marched through the streets during the national holiday as participants in the victory parade.[124] In Paris, however, the expectations many Chinese had for the peace talks were bitterly disappointed and would consequently turn the joy about the end of the war into anger, especially since imperialism had shown its face again, just at the moment the destruction of so many lives due to imperialist aims had ended. Nothing had changed, and the diplomats the Chinese had sent to France could only try to resist the imperialism and anti–Chinese jingoism of the Western powers and Japan.

60 delegates were led by Lu Zhengxiang and Wang Zhengting, representing their respective Chinese governments, and many of the diplomats involved had been active in China's diplomatic service in several Western countries, some even for decades, having started their careers under the Qing Dynasty. Considering the intellectual power the Chinese government had mobilized for the peace talks in France, it is obvious that it was attempting to achieve bigger things than just being treated as an inferior participant. In contrast to Japan, whose government was granted five seats at the negotiation table and therefore was ranked as a great power, China was granted only two seats and therefore degraded to the status of an unimportant participant. The high expectations related to former promises and to Wilson's declarations during the war had been replaced by blunt great power policy again. The Chinese could do nothing to overcome the jingoist treatment it had had to deal with since the Opium Wars of the previous century. Regardless of this treatment, however, the Chinese delegation and its

123 Xu, Asia and the Great War, p. 161.
124 Ibid., pp. 162–163.

diplomats did everything possible to achieve the goals the government in Beijing had announced to regain its political and territorial sovereignty:

1) The restoration of rights related to foreign concessions in China and related lease treaties, i.e. the Shandong issue,
2) the sovereignty of China as a nation state by abolishing the so–called Boxer protocol of 1901, i.e. first and foremost the end of foreign troops and jurisdiction in China, and
3) the reintroduction of tariff autonomy.[125]

The expression of these aims was answered with a rejection from the other powers, who were not interested in discussing things unrelated to the First World War, although China could insist on a discussion of the Shandong issue.

Wellington Koo, who presented the Chinese demands on 28 January 1919, provided a detailed explanation of this issue, arguing on behalf of the self–determination of nations – the people of Shandong were Chinese – and emphasizing that the existent agreements with Japan, which had been signed during the war, had only been accepted due to Japanese pressure. The peace conference could hardly accept such treaties, so Koo's argument went, and since Germany had been at war with China as well, it could have hardly transferred Chinese rights to a third power, i.e. Japan. The Chinese made these points because they truly believed in the idea of the League of Nations and that there was a genuine interest at the peace conference to establish equality and a secure peace. They must have been surprised, to say the least, when it emerged that the Western powers had already signed secret treaties with Japan, in which the question of Shandong had already been dealt with. Another treaty between Duan Qirui and Japan showed that the Japanese government had also already received rights with regard to the territory that ran along the railway tracks in the province.[126]

China was one of the victims of the peace negotiations in France. Wilson's claim for the self–determination of nations obviously only counted when geostrategically relevant for the Western powers, and nobody seemed to be willing to challenge Japanese expansionism. China was consequently robbed by its neighbor while the world discussed a future without war. Considering these issues, the peace talks were rather more interested in securing the interests of the Entente than in truly preparing the ground for a solid post–war order based on peace and equality.[127] The delegation from China could hardly do anything, although

125 Ibid., p. 165.
126 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 175–176.
127 Stephen G. Craft, John Bassett Moore, Robert Lansing, and the Shandong Question, in: Pacific Historical Review 66 (1997) 2, pp. 231–249, here p. 233.

they had prepared themselves by recruiting international help in advance as well. An authority on international law, John Bassett Moore (1860–1947), had been recruited as a legal advisor for the Chinese delegation to serve and assist it during the Paris Peace Conference. He had signed a three–year contract, receiving US$ 4,000 per year for his services. The agreement was secret, because China, while knowing that it would need such a specialist to help their cause, did not want to arouse too much interest in its preparations. Moore, however, was aware that it would not be international lawyers who would be discussing the future of the world in general, and China's fate in particular. He let his daughter know "that they [Wilson, as well as other political leaders of the Western powers] do not want 'international lawyers,' as they are likely to be prejudiced in favor of the past, with all its evil associations and practices."[128] Regardless of his considerations, he tried to help the Chinese delegation with a legal claim to get their rights to Shandong back, but Wilson was not willing to argue about any Sino–Japanese treaties. In the end, China had only two choices: sign the Versailles Peace Treaty with reservations or not sign it at all. The Big Four of the conference – Britain, France, Italy, and the United States –, however, declared that a signature with reservations was not going to be accepted and that China would only have the right to complain after signing the treaty.[129]

The Japanese at the same time offered a compromise, namely the declaration of 30 April 1919, according to which China would receive its rights to Shandong back at a future moment in time; however, it did not define when exactly that was supposed to be. Although the economic privileges for Japan would remain, this declaration was considered a friendly offer from Japan's delegation by the diplomats representing the Western powers. Next to Wilson, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863–1945) and French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929) eventually took a pro–Japanese stance. Ultimately, Germany, according to paragraph 156 of the Treaty of Versailles, had to transfer its rights in Shandong to Japan. The Chinese delegation, on the other hand, did not sign the treaty in the end.[130] Of course, this was a bitter moment for China, and on 2 May 1919, its "delegation asserts that the reported action of the Council of Three in transferring the German rights to Japan is not in keeping with the principles of peace laid down by the Allied and associated powers."[131] What happened needed no explanation, as the motives for the decisions of the major Allied powers were well

128 Cited in ibid.
129 Ibid., pp. 238–240.
130 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 177–178.
131 China Calls Decision of Big 3 'Unfair', in: New York Tribune, 4 May 1919, p. 4.

known. The explanation in the *New York Tribune* was as frank as possible when it stated: "It appears clear, then, that the council has been bestowing on Japan the rights, not of Germany, but of China; not of an enemy, but of an ally. The more powerful ally has reaped a benefit at the expense, not of the common enemy, but of the weaker ally."[132] And from a Chinese perspective, as *The Sun* (New York) declared, nothing but injustice had been done: "in the opinion of the Chinese delegation the decision had been made without regard for justice or the protection of the territorial integrity of China."[133] The violation of Chinese rights was the direct reason for the protests, but, as has been shown before, the long–term reasons also played a role. Now, with another humiliation at hand, a nationalist protest would arise in China that criticized the Treaty of Versailles, but at the same time demanded reforms to the political structures so as to eventually achieve Chinese unity that would secure the nation state's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2.5 The May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong*) in China was a heterogeneous protest movement that was in a way a direct result of the Treaty of Versailles and the political mistreatment of the Chinese nation state by Japan and the West; however, it was also the result of long–term developments in China, e.g. the factionalism that divided the country or the increase of violence in the era of the warlords. The movement combined different protests into one national upheaval that shook the country in the direct aftermath of the First World War. It might have begun as a student movement on 4 May 1919, but it became a national protest movement rather fast. While the focus is usually on the year 1919, one can also consider the events in May as a culmination of an intellectual renewal movement that spanned over the years between 1917 and 1921. It was a clash between tradition and modernity, young and old, so to speak, and the struggles would supposedly decide China's fate and future. The intellectuals at Beijing University were interested in a Chinese modernity that would break with the conservative traditions and confronted the students at this institution with new thoughts and alternatives. The demand for a break with the past was even more imminent due to the results of the Paris Peace Conference, as the negotiations showed that while new ideas were prominently promoted during the war, nothing had changed. China was still treated like a colonial sphere, equality was

132 Ibid.
133 China Also Balks, in: The Sun, 7 May 1919, p. 1.

a wish rather than a reality, and corruption still determined Chinese politics, as Duan Qirui was considered as responsible for China's misery as the Allied Powers, whose demands against imperialism and for the self–determination of nations were nothing more than a tool, only to be used when it fitted the great power policies of the West. Capitalism and therefore imperialism still dominated world politics, and the frustration about the fact that nothing had changed was an immense factor with regard to the outbreak of protests in Beijing in May 1919.

It has been argued that it makes sense to trace the May Fourth Movement back to 1915, when the journal *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*) had been founded in Beijing, and to extend its impact and role until the mid–1920s.[134] In a political sense, the May Fourth Movement marked the awakening of the Chinese nation as well as the starting point of a broader anti–Japanese and therefore anti–imperialist movement in China, which not only demanded a fight against the warlord system, but would also lead to the establishment of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1921.[135] The working class joined forces with the students for the first time, although China's industrial working class was not large enough to claim representation for the mass of people. Others who protested demanded the emancipation of women and equality of the sexes. It was consequently a broad revolutionary and nationalist movement, combining heterogeneous forces that were brought together by their wish for a better China. To claim that the Treaty of Versailles was the only reason for the existence of the May Fourth Movement would consequently not be sufficient.[136] Of course, the decision about Shandong was perceived as "unjust" and had "violated the principles of international law,"[137] and Chinese students in the US claimed that "for Japan to retain these concessions and claim them by the right of conquest is to justify the retention of the plundered goods of a burglar."[138] Nobody who had believed in Wilson's motto of self–determination could believe that Japan was supposed to keep the rights it had received during the war years, and the editors of *The Chinese Students' Monthly*, a journal for Chinese students in the US, declared that the

> treaty of 1915 [i.e. the acceptance of the attenuated Twenty–One Demands, F.J.] was made under circumstances which would render it null and void. It was made with a threat of war.

134 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 188.

135 On the early years of the CPC see Hans J. Van de Ven, From Friend to Comrade. The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927, Berkeley, CA 1991.

136 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 189.

137 China's Grievances over Shantung, in: The Chinese Students' Monthly 15 (1919) 1, pp. 3–6, here p. 3.

138 Ibid., p. 4.

> It was signed under the duress of an ultimatum. The consent contained therein was wrested from China at the point of the bayonet, and as such, it could not justify Japan's retention of the German concessions. [. . .] No more can Japan justify her possession of the German concessions in Shantung by the Treaty of 1915 than can a burglar justify his claim to the possession of the robbed goods by a written consent signed at the point of the revolver.[139]

Nobody in China could stand by in 1919, just observing these events, which so resembled Chinese weakness, due to its leaders' incapacities as well as the nation state's lack of modernization. Therefore, multiple forces that had criticized the current state of political affairs, the rise of the warlords, and the lack of a Chinese national identity – namely, the modernization or Westernization movement of the 1860s (*yangwu yundong*),[140] the reform movement of 1898 (*wuxu bianfa*),[141] and the revolutionaries of 1911 (*xinhai geming*) – eventually joined forces and became part of the larger national movement, i.e. the May Fourth Movement.

Many of the intellectuals who supported the movement had been studying abroad, and when they returned to China, they had naturally become agents of modernization.[142] For them especially, who might have been true believers in the chances of a better world after 1918, the events in France were more than humiliating. They naturally became important leaders of the new protest movement.[143] In the years during the First World War, many new journals had been founded and offered a broader variety of discussions, especially to students, whose most important concern was the future of education. A conflict about the right path to a better future was naturally occurring when traditionalists, who wanted to stick with social values and tradition, as they were related to

139 Ibid.

140 Ding Xianjun, Yangwu yundong shihua, Beijing 2000. In English see John King Fairbank/Merle Goldman, China. A New History, second edition, Cambridge, MA 2006, pp. 217–234.

141 Mao Haijian, Wuxu bianfa shi shikao, Beijing 2005. For a broader discussion of the reform movement in English see Paul A. Cohen/John E. Schreckner (Eds.), Reform in Nineteenth–Century China, Cambridge, MA 1976.

142 For a contemporary discussion of Chinese students abroad see Y. S. Tsao, A Challenge to Western Learning. The Chinese Student Trained Abroad – What He Has Accomplished – His Problems, in: News Bulletin (Institute of Pacific Relations), December 1927, pp. 13–16. For a broader discussion of Chinese students abroad, especially in Germany and the US, Thomas Harnisch, Chinesische Studenten in Deutschland. Geschichte und Wirkung ihrer Studienaufenthalte in den Jahren 1860 bis 1945, Hamburg 1999; Edward Rhoads, Stepping Forth into the World. The Chinese Educational Mission to the United States 1872–1881, Hong Kong 2011 and Weili Ye, Searching Modernity in China's Name. Chinese Students in the United States, 1900–1927, Stanford 2001 are recommended.

143 Nancy F. Sizer, John Dewey's Ideas in China 1919 to 1921, in: Comparative Education Review 10 (1966) 3, pp. 390–403, here p. 390.

Confucianism, and modernists, who depicted a more Western modernization for China, clashed over who was rightfully determining the country's eventual course. What a majority of intellectuals shared in 1919 was a belief in a democratic form of government as well as evolutionary progress that was based on modern education.[144] While Chinese students had traditionally had to memorize the classics and not critically think and argue, Cai Yuanpei considered education "a means of cultivating virtuous or moral character in the young. This moral training was to be supplanted by an industrial and military education and rounded out by an aesthetic one."[145] Students initially admired Japan, whose modernization process since the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 had been considered successful. The May Fourth Movement, however, was directed against both Chinese traditional education and Japan as an idolized modern Asian nation state. The protesters were seeking other solutions for what a modern education and an independent and sovereign Chinese nation state should be based on. The students who returned from abroad, not only from Japan but the US and Germany as well, brought new ideas with them and wanted to use their newly gained knowledge to transform the existent society at home.

The people who initially formed the May Fourth Movement, like in many protest and probably revolutionary movements, represented a young generation, mostly born in the 1890s, who longed for change because they did not consider the current state of China to be a place where their ambitions and dreams could be reached or fulfilled. Intellectuals like Hu Shi (1891–1962), Gu Jiegang (1893–1980), Fu Sinian (1896–1950), and Mao Zedong dreamed of a new Chinese society, especially since they had witnessed the Russian Revolution of 1917, which seemed to promise a chance for a new age and a more equal and classless society. In 1919, not too much information about the internal state of Soviet Russia and the corruption of the revolution by Lenin was known abroad, and intellectuals and revolutionaries worldwide hoped for a near world revolution in the name of equality.[146] It was argued that the Chinese Revolution of 1911 had failed because people were not willing to modernize, but rather were trapped between tradition and modernity, paralyzed and unable to bring

144 Ibid.

145 Cyrus H. Peake, Nationalism and Education in Modern China, New York 1932, p. 76 cited in ibid., p. 391.

146 Criticism was often seen as an attempt to undermine the achievements of the Russian Revolution, and even later critics had initially believed that it would change the world instead of establishing another regime. Frank Jacob, From Aspiration to Frustration. Emma Goldman's Perception of the Russian Revolution, in: American Communist History 17 (2018) 2, pp. 185–199.

the revolution to a fruitful end. Modernization could hardly change the Chinese mentality, and therefore the revolutionary attempt was incomplete. While a Chinese Republic had been created on paper, the Chinese people were still living in the past. Charles K. Edmund (1876–1949),the President of the Canton Christian College in 1918 and 1919, described the problems modern educators faced in China as follows: "Religion, government, and reverence for antiquity have been the dominant influences in shaping the course of Chinese education."[147] He also emphasized that the country was simply too large, and since the revolution in 1911, there was an insufficient number of higher education institutions to offer a broader education to the Chinese people.[148]

For the reformers and revolutionaries like Sun Yat–sen, who demanded a "national rescue" in 1911, Western education was only considered a tool, and the slogan "Chinese learning for fundamental principles, Western learning for practical applications" (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*) was promoted; however, in contrast to Japan's government–promoted "Japanese spirit, Western technology" (*wakon yōsai*) strategy, it failed to achieve permanent results.[149] The attempts to enlighten China, i.e. to overcome the Confucian tradition of ritualized submission, were not easy to achieve, since the three principles (*sangang*) that ordered the relationships between ruler and subordinate, father and son, and husband and wife were essential to the lives of the Chinese, as were the five basic relations (*wulun*) between ruler and minister, father and son, older and younger brother, husband and wife, and between friends.[150] To prepare the path towards a new China meant breaking these existent relations and the rules they were based on. Of course, education played an important role because new values needed to be taught. As a consequence, academics, educators, and intellectuals in general "were experiencing major upheavals and innovations in the 1910s, trying to define their institutional structure, intellectual ideals and intellectuals' role in society."[151]

147 Charles K. Edmunds, Modern Education in China, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 1919, No. 44, Washington 1919, p. 5.

148 Ibid., pp. 24–25.

149 Geng Yunzhi, An Introductory Study on China's Cultural Transformation in Recent Times, Berlin 2014, pp. 79–116. On wakon yōsai see Peter Lutum, Das Denken von Minakata Kumagusu und Yanagita Kunio. Zwei Pioniere der japanischen Volkskunde im Spiegel der Leitmotive wakon–yōsai und wayō–setchū, Münster 2005 and Hirakawa Sukehiro, Wakon yōsai no keifu. Uchi to soto kara no Meiji Nihon, Tokyo 1992.

150 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 191–192.

151 Forster, 1919, p. 20.

In 1905, Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) was responsible for a first reform when she abolished exams for civil servants. In the past, civil servants had to be familiar with Confucian works. Now, students were learning in schools and universities that were teaching according to Western or often Japanese examples. Their learning experiences were consequently totally different, and although the classics were still part of their education, the students had to read them "as part of history or the history of literature, rather than as timeless truths."[152] Due to these changes it also became easier for intellectuals to criticize politics, because they were acting based on reason than following traditional paradigms of submission. The consequence was some kind of Chinese Enlightenment, and the corruption as well as failures of the warlords' politics were more openly discussed. Such discussions were in addition more public, as the press created a new sphere of publicity in the early 1900s when more and more newspapers, periodicals and journals reached an increasing number of readers, thereby stimulating nationalist discourse at the same time.[153] Schools and universities were also responsible for this increase in periodicals because many of them published their own newspapers or journals, like the *Beijing University Daily*. Eventually, there was an overlap between academia and the press, between intellectual discourse and politics. The weakness of the government during the warlord period also gave more room to critical voices, and many intellectuals began open and critical discussions about the future of China. In these circles, especially at Beijing University, however, traditionalists (Old Faction) and modernizers (New Faction) also clashed over their opinions on the form of education as well as the future of the nation.[154]

On the face of it, they might have discussed the use of language, i.e. traditional vs. actually spoken Chinese, but this was not all. Nevertheless, the front line between the two factions was not always clear, as it was often presented later, because there were many blurred positions that tended to be found on both sides from time to time.[155] While the intellectuals as Beijing University struggled over the correct use of language, they indirectly fought over the future of China as such. Conservative ideas and positions, on the one hand, demanded a stronger focus on genuinely Chinese values, while progressive intellectuals pressed for the modernization of China by a stronger focus on values and thoughts that

152 Ibid., p. 21.

153 The Shanghai News sold 20,000 issues in 1917, and 30,000 in 1920, while the number of periodicals as such reached more than 800 in the late 1910s and 2,000 in the early 1920s. Ibid., p. 23.

154 For a more detailed analysis of the struggle between the two academic factions at Beijing University see ibid., pp. 30–32.

155 Ibid., p. 39.

had been imported to the country from abroad. That such discussions originated at the university of the Chinese capital is not surprising. Beijing University was the only remnant of the Hundred Days' reform in 1898.[156] Before Cai Yuanpei took over the presidency in December 1916, his predecessors like Yan Fu (1854–1921) had already begun to implement initial reforms with regard to the education of the university's students.[157] Other intellectuals like Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi and Li Dazhao (1889–1927) followed Cai's call to serve at Beijing University, where they would provide the core group of educators that stimulated a more open and critical education, poetically named the "wind of learning at Beijing University" (*Beida xuefeng*).[158] The new educational program, "education with a worldview" (*shijieguan jiaoyu*), also positively influenced the position of the students, who became more involved, more active, and eventually more demanding. Confucianism was criticized as something that prevented China's modernization, and an active struggle with the nation's own past began. Some clamored "Down with Confucian teachings" (*dadao ruxue*), others "Down with tradition" (dadao chuantong).[159] Li Dazhao, who worked in the university library before being promoted to the rank of professor, studied and taught Marxism there, and referred to the Russian Revolution as a historical success that could be an example for China. Like Lenin in Russia, he considered a revolution possible, as long as the majority of peasants were led by an intellectual avant–garde. For that, the agrarian population of China needed to be liberated from its suppression by the corrupt warlords as well as the government of men like Duan Qirui.[160]

In spring 1918 Li founded a study group for socialism (*shehui zhuyi yanjiuhui*) at the university, and a special issue of the journal *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) provided a detailed discussion of Marxism in May of the same year. Li published an article in this issue, in which he provided a survey of his own views on Marxism, "My Views on Marxism" ("Wo de Makesi zhuyiguan"), and therefore became one of the early influential Marxist leaders in China. When Mao Zedong had finished his studies in Hunan, he supposedly also joined the student group that mostly consisted of Marxists as well.[161] However, it was not

156 Rebecca E. Karl/Peter Gue Zarrow (Eds.), Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period. Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China, Cambridge, MA 2002.
157 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 192–193.
158 Ibid., p. 194.
159 Ibid., p. 197.
160 On Li see Maurice Meisner, Li Ta–Chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism, Cambridge, MA 1967.
161 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 199.

only Marxist ideas that were discussed. New input was received in many fields, such as economics, literature, art, etc. All in all, the years of the First World War had been very vibrant at Beijing University. The results of the Paris Peace Conference would eventually set the critical potential of the students free, and they not only went onto the streets to protest against Western and Japanese imperialism, but they also protested against an antiquated China that should exist no longer: too traditional, disunited, corrupt, and, most importantly, weak. The May Fourth Movement was supposed to break the chains that constrained the Chinese nation, no matter if they had been forged in foreign environments or at home.

The events of 4 May 1919 clearly showed that the students were not willing to accept another humiliation from Western or Japanese imperialism, that they wanted to change their country, and that they wanted to live in a sovereign and independent nation that was ruled according to reason and by the masses of the people, not by a corrupt government that would sell out Chinese territory to the Japanese just to remain in power. The reaction of the young intellectuals showed that the republican policy since the revolution in 1911 had failed to create a modern nation state that the young generations could identify themselves with and in which they felt they had a perspective. The universities had become revolutionary hubs where a generation was educated that would no longer accept the existent structures. When the news arrived from Paris on 2 May 1919, it was clear that the barrel was going to overflow. Demonstrations and protests that had been planned for 7 May 1919, the day China had received an ultimatum to sign the final version of the initial Twenty–One Demands in 1915, were brought forward to 4 May.[162] Fu Sinian,[163] who had been radicalized at Beijing University, was one of the initiators of the movement and, as a native of Shandong Province, felt particularly humiliated by the decision that Japan should receive the German rights there. On 3 May 1919, he was nominated at a meeting of the planning committee of all universities and colleges of the city to act as their chairman, and it was decided that the protests should begin the next day, Sunday, at the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen).

Around 3,000 male and female students had gathered on Tiananmen Square by 1:30 pm, more than 50% of all students in Beijing at that time, representing the 13 universities and colleges as well as the Female Teacher College (Beijing

162 Ibid., p. 206. On the heterogenous organization of the protests and the involved groups and ideas see Arif Dirlik, Ideology and Organization in the May Fourth Movement. Some Problems in the Intellectual Historiography of the May Fourth Period, in: Republican China 12 (1987) 1, pp. 3–19.

163 On Fu's life and work see Wang Fan–sen, Fu Ssu–nien. A Life in Chinese History and Politics, Cambridge/New York 2006.

nüzi shifan). They marched to the Legation Quarter wearing flags and banners bearing anti–Japanese slogans and demands for the return of Shandong to China. They protested against Japanese imperialism as well as against their own political leadership, which was deemed corrupt and unable to lead China to a prospective future. Flyers were handed out, demanding that the Allied Powers rethink their decision and give Shandong back to China. The manifesto of the May Fourth Movement had been provided by the author Luo Jialun (1896–1969), who, together with Fu Sinian, edited the journal *New Flood* (*Xinchao*). The protesters wanted to march to the embassies of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy, but the police did not allow them to enter the Legation Quarter. Consequently, the students changed their route and instead continued their protest march to the house of former Vice–Minister of Foreign Affairs Cao Rulin (1877–1966), who was a member of the Anhui Clique and had negotiated with the Japanese over the Twenty–One Demands. He was one of the politicians that were friendly to Japan, and due to his involvement in the talks with the Japanese government during the war years, he was a natural target for the protesters.[164]

It was originally not the intention of the organizers of the demonstration to use violence, but when they reached the house of Cao, some of the students went in and, since the pro–Japanese politician was no longer there, they destroyed the interior and looted some rooms. The students found Zhang Zongxiang (1879–1962), a politician responsible for Japanese matters, in hiding, and he was eventually beaten up by the protesters until he lost consciousness. When the police arrived, most of the students had fled, but Fu Sinian, Luo Jialun, and some 30 others were arrested. They, however, had to be released again, because the government was under extreme pressure and public opinion demanded freedom for the protest's leaders. In fact, a nationalist wave went through the country, and sympathy for those who had protested on 4 May 1919 could clearly be felt. The demonstrations spread across the country, and more protests, no longer only by students, were witnessed in other cities.[165] Businessmen called for a boycott of Japanese goods, and workers and artisans went on strike. In the harbors, the ships from Japan remained loaded, and in Hangzhou, rickshaw drivers would no longer offer their services to the Japanese. Until July 1919, the import of cotton and cement from Japan collapsed, and the amount of other imported goods was also decreasing.[166] The students in Beijing had already begun to strike on 19 May,

164 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 207–208.

165 For Shanghai, to name just one example, see Joseph T. Chen, The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai. The Making of a Social Movement in Modern China, Leiden 1971.

166 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 209.

and many from other cities solidarized themselves with their fellows in the capital when they began to strike in Shanghai, Wuhan and other cities. Luo Jialun described the national wave of protests on 23 May when he argued that the spirit of the students ended the lethargy of society.[167] It was this spirit, as Luo highlighted, that was necessary for the birth of a new, nationally united China. Three days later, 12,000 students and pupils protested in Shanghai, hoisting the flag of the Chinese Republic to express their national identity. In Wuhan, the pro–Japanese military governor suppressed the protests and ordered his soldiers to beat up or even shoot the students if they did not comply with his orders. Chinese President Xu Shichang (1855–1939) declared that the students should go to the universities and learn, instead of protesting in the streets. Regardless of such attempts to contain the protest movement, it had reached a national level.[168] The strikes had motivated workers, artisans, and soldiers to follow the students' example, but in Beijing the government answered the national outcry with mass arrests in early June 1919. When more than 1,000 students were held prisoner in the rooms of Beijing University, 60–70,000 people protested in Shanghai on 5 June 1919. On the same day, thousands of female protesters gathered at Xu Shichang's residence to show solidarity with the imprisoned students.[169]

The protest could not be localized and suppressed by the government, and it eventually reacted to some of the demands when pro–Japanese ministers, including Cao Rulin, were dismissed from their duties. In Paris, the Chinese delegation did not sign the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, and thereby at least protested symbolically against the imperialist nature of the document's contents. In 1916, Chen Duxiu had already demanded a form of democracy that really represented the will of the people, who should rule and hold the political power within an independent nation state.[170] On 1 December 1919, he published an "Idealist Manifesto of the New Youth" ("Xin qingnian xuanyan") in which he argued that the demand for possessions, be it by plutocrats or warlords, must be countered and that democracy demanded equal rights for all people. The parties, who only represented the wishes and needs of a few, of the privileged classes so to speak, should not be something the common people would be members of. The manifesto also demanded the emancipation of women,

167 Vera Schwarcz, The Chinese Enlightenment. Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Berkeley 1986, p. 22.

168 Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 210–211.

169 Ibid., 211.

170 Edward X. Gu, Populistic Themes in May Fourth Radical Thinking. A Reappraisal of the Intellectual Origins of Chinese Marxism (1917–1922), in: East Asian History 10 (1995), pp. 99–126, here p. 109.

among other changes that would establish a better society in the future.[171] It was, in a way, the disappointment of the hopes and dreams of the young generation in China that had stimulated the outbreak of the protests on 4 May 1919. For Li Dazhao, with the end of the First World War, a new epoch had begun in 1919:

> [T]his new epoch has brought with it new life, new civilisation, a new world. [. . .] From today onwards we realise the gross error [of imperialism and social Darwinism] for we now know that material evolution does not rely upon competition, but rather mutual aid. The weakness of mankind is that they wish for survival, wish to enjoy happiness and wellbeing, for which purpose the relationship between us should be fraternal love, we should not slaughter each other by force of arms.[172]

The reality, however, had proved the Chinese hopes wrong. Western and Japanese imperialism did not end with the First World War, nor did China receive a more democratic government. Hence the students were also no longer willing to accept that as their eternal fate and demanded change. Others in China listened to their demands and joined the protests, because they had realized that change demanded action.

Elisabeth Forster is consequently absolutely correct when she calls 1919 "a year of radical cultural transformation in China,"[173] and many of the students who protested as part of the May Fourth Movement would have an immense impact on China's further historical course. In the summer of 1919, the term "New Culture Movement" was coined to describe the heterogeneity of the protest movement as such, "with a matrix of reference points [. . .] used to sell a variety of the cultural reform agendas that were then competing" and used "as a buzzword [it supposedly] determined which of the agendas would be successful in the competition they were all engaged in, and in this way it shaped China's cultural path."[174] All participants, especially the intellectuals involved, projected their own agenda on the movement, which consequently was a heterogenous rally (*Sammlungsbewegung*) whose participants all channeled their own ideas through it, or, to quote Forster again, "May Fourth intellectuals were people of

171 Chen Duxiu, Duxiu wencun, Xianggang 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 366–368, cited in Kuhn, Republik China, pp. 212–213.

172 Li Dazhao, Xin jiyuan, in: Li Dazhao quanji, Shijiazhuang 1999, Vol. 3, p. 128, cited in: Xu Jilin, Historical Memories of May Fourth. Patriotism, but of What Kind?, in: China Heritage Quarterly 17 (2009), http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=017_mayfourthmemories.inc&issue=017 (30. 9. 2019).

173 Forster, 1919, p. 1.

174 Ibid., p. 13.

flesh and blood, not abstract agents of a vision."[175] The protesters, however, did not long solely for a Western modernity, as Rana Mitter has Eurocentrically argued, but demanded their own modernity, which would, of course, have been partly influenced by Western thoughts, but was definitely not solely Western in its nature.[176] A breakup of the Chinese traditions would not have meant the abolition of China's identity as such. All in all, the movement achieved larger publicity because the actions of activists from different origins – academia, public media, and politics – joined with each other to express their criticism together.[177] Since people from different regions participated, due to being able to coordinate their actions through modernized means of transportation and print capitalism, the rise of nationalism as described by Karl W. Deutsch (1912–1992), Ernest Gellner (1925–1995), and Benedict Anderson (1936–2015) was a natural consequence, especially since it could also turn against a foreign and antagonistic Other, i.e. Japan.[178]

2.6 Conclusion

Regardless of China's political instability and its division by the imperialist claims from the Western powers and Japan, political scientist Brantly Womack is correct to highlight that "it has never scattered."[179] The bipolarity of Japan and China in East Asia, however, was very openly and aggressively emphasized by the actions of the Japanese government, whose representatives used the First World War as a good opportunity to extend its sphere of influence, or, to quote American historian Ernest R. May (1928–2009), it "liberated Japanese ambitions."[180] At the same time, it stimulated Chinese nationalism, as many intellectuals, students, workers, businessmen, women, soldiers, etc. felt humiliated by both Japan's Twenty–One Demands and the Treaty of Versailles alike. They gathered to protest against these events, but eventually formed part of a heterogeneous

175 Ibid., p. 15.
176 Rana Mitter, A Bitter Revolution. China's Struggle with the Modern World, Oxford 2004.
177 Forster, 1919, p. 16.
178 Anderson, Imagined Communities; Karl W. Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality, Cambridge, MA 1953; Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, Ithaca, NY 1983.
179 Brantly Womack, China between Region and World, in: The China Journal 61 (2009), pp. 1–20, here p. 6.
180 Ernest R. May, American Policy and Japan's Entrance into World War I, in: The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 40 (1953) 2, pp. 279–290, here p. 279.

protest movement, whose members demanded a better future for a united and strong Chinese nation state that would resist any further humiliation from Japan or the West.

Regardless of the potential of the May Fourth Movement to overcome Chinese fragmentation, as this was caused by the corruption of its politicians, the rise of the warlords, and the imperialist expansion of Japan, the protests lacked consistency beyond 1919 and were not able to achieve or enforce any political changes.[181] Mao Zedong's evaluation, as quoted before, highlighted two problems. China, to become a true and unified nation, needed to include the majority of its people, i.e. the agrarian population, and, as history would prove, it would have to fight Japan. The ordinary people did not have any idea about some of the abstract demands of the intellectuals – e.g. political sovereignty or the dignity of women – and therefore could neither identify themselves with the protest movement nor with China as a nation in general. The May Fourth Movement was a first national upheaval, directed against Japanese and Western imperialism, and would be an important step for the development of the Chinese communist movement. While it was unsuccessful in 1919, its impact would be tremendous. It would be the communists who would gain from the initial combination of anti–imperialism and nationalism in China, but they would eventually succeed in one aspect that the May Fourth Movement could not. It was the communists who reached out to the provinces, to the common Chinese people, the uneducated masses, and who could use the war against Japan to form a true political mass movement, whose leaders and their successors determined the fate of China and continue to do so even today. That Chinese nationalism turned from an anti–imperialist to an imperialist one is probably the fate of that of any nation state, no matter if it claims to be communist or not. Today, the bipolarity in East Asia and the struggle between China and Japan still determines the fate of the region, but the relationship is still poisoned by its past, especially the Twenty–One Demands and the loss of Shandong in 1919. Due to the centennial, tensions rose again when the humiliation of China by the Japanese was remembered, even though the Chinese eventually achieved national unity, at least on paper. The events in Hong Kong in 2019 show that there is now a new generation of students who demand change and a different future to the one proclaimed by the government in Beijing. It remains to be seen if they have the right ideas and the means to reinvigorate a national protest movement in the near future or if they will be crushed by a violent regime, as their predecessors were on Tiananmen Square in 1989.

181 Kuhn, Republik China, p. 226.