Rivalry and Alliance: Chinese Trade Unions and State Power in the Twentieth Century, with Special Attention to Qingdao and Shanghai

by

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Abstract

Rivalry and Alliance: Chinese Trade Unions and State Power in the Twentieth Century

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This study focuses on one aspect of China’s labor movement—the relationship between trade unions as a societal force and state power as a political force in the pre-1949 and post-Mao reform years, illustrating that this relationship was characterized by alliance and rivalry and that unions, instead of being tools in the hands of political parties, represented the basic interests of workers and therefore demonstrated a considerable popular character.

Chinese trade unions have been closely connected to state and other political forces. These forces needed workers’ support in consolidating or striving for state power and therefore regarded it imperative to become involved in labor mobilization, particularly in organizing trade unions. Their involvement partly accounted for the proliferation of various labor organizations, including "signboard" and "yellow" as well as "red" unions, in the pre-1949 years. Such involvement also helped to shape unions’ character and functions and gave them certain political orientations. However, political authorities or parties, whether warlord or GMD or CCP, were not able to transform unions into pure instruments of partisan struggles, due to contradictions, competition, or mutual check among these political forces. Competition also existed between
different factions within a certain regime, such as the struggle between the city party branch and city government within the GMD. The political parties’ aspiration for overriding their rivals compelled them to cultivate confidence of workers as a social group and, for this purpose, they had to show consideration for labor problems and interests, which in turn made it possible for unions to maintain some popular character and a certain degree of autonomy no matter whatever their political orientations. On the other hand, workers seem not so passive as to be easily manipulated by politicians. Having a keen sense of their own distinct interests (primarily economic), they would chose to support only those political parties that offered them the most and join and defend unions that best represented them. The restraints on the power of political authorities or forces and the ability of laborers to make choice and the possibility for them to do so determined that the union-state relationship could be a partnership or alliance. While political forces including state had to use trade unions as an ally, they also regarded the latter as a rival and a potential challenge to their efforts to monopolize and consolidate power. Therefore, every dominant political party or state power-holder attempted to harness trade unions and limit the scope of their activities.
and Trade Unions

1. Alliance between the Party and Trade Unions in the Warlord Era, 1921-1927
2. "Red Trade Union" Movement in the "White Area", 1927-1937
3. Resumption of the Alliance of the Party and Trade Unions, 1936-1949

Part III Trade Unions under the Chinese Communist Party

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Introduction

No less than their Western counterparts, Chinese workers in the 20th century have shown a strong inclination to organize themselves and, specifically, to form trade unions. Indeed, to have their own trade unions and to struggle for the unions' legitimacy have been two of Chinese workers' major concerns. The activities of trade unions have constituted an important episode of China's associational life in modern times except for the short interregnum of "socialism" under Mao Zedong.

Past scholarship on the history of Chinese social organizations seems to have focused on merchant and professional associations as well as intellectual societies, 1

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and paid relatively little attention to trade unions. The issue of trade unions has usually been addressed as part of the general history of workers and labor movement. Such inattention to trade unions may be due to the following reasons. Firstly, workers, usually less educated and inarticulate, could not publicize their cause as forcibly as intellectuals and merchants. Moreover, Chinese workers and trade unions, almost from the outset, were involved in political or partisan struggles. Concentrated and largely connected with modern industries, workers were a force to be reckoned with and their support was solicited by all political parties or powers. The latter’s rhetoric or propaganda sometimes overshadowed the popular character of trade unions as social organizations. Such political involvement could also


lead to the belief that Chinese trade unions were simply tools in the hands of political parties. It is not surprising that workers' movements and trade union activities are usually treated as part of Communist Party history in mainland China and sometimes as part of Guomindang history by Taiwanese scholars. In addition, compared to intellectuals and merchants, workers and their trade unions faced more restraints from political authorities and were more susceptible to their suppression. All political regimes, whether warlord or Nationalist or Communist, were concerned with maintaining secure sources of revenue in stable industrial production and tended to keep a close watch on workers' organizational activities. These factors combine to leave an impression that Chinese trade unions were not independent and therefore do not deserve a particular study.

My research suggests that, despite the impediments outlined above, Chinese trade unions before 1949 largely maintained their popular character as workers' organizations and enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy from dominant political forces or state power. By autonomy, I mean not that trade unions were immune from political influence but that they were not necessarily always manipulated by external political interests. Most trade unions, whether they were formed on the workers' own initiative or organized by outsiders (e.g., politicians and gangster leaders), had a popular basis. When becoming involved in political or partisan
struggles, they acted largely as allies or partners of some political parties rather than simply as the latter's instruments and fought for their own benefits rather than just for partisan interests. So when I refer to the "autonomy" of trade unions in this study, I mean that the unions represented, to various degrees, the interests of their constituents, workers, despite their connections or even collaboration with ruling regimes and other political forces. It is my supposition that fully autonomous trade unions (and perhaps any fully autonomous social organization) can exist only under a democratic system; and that in Chinese history there has as yet been no such a system and accordingly no unions with full and secure autonomy of the sort that can be found at times within the union movement in Western democracies.

If Chinese trade unions enjoyed relative autonomy before 1949, it was due primarily to the diversity of political forces and the fragmentation and weakness of state power. This was particularly pronounced in the second decade of the 20th century, when the political landscape of China was dominated by warlords. The deep divisions and fragmentation inherent with warlord political authorities dictated that the latter could not constitute an effective check on the increasingly active societal forces including workers and trade unions. On the other hand, the contradictions and conflicts among different warlord factions could be exploited by trade unions
to their own advantage. Just as some political forces tried to win the support of workers and trade unions, the latter could find allies among certain political forces.

The state power represented by warlord was also vulnerable to checks or restraints by worker nationalism. In the early 20th century, most of China’s major industries were dominated by foreign capital, particularly in coastal cities like Qingdao and Shanghai. A large number of Chinese industrial laborers worked in foreign enterprises and directly faced foreign capitalists. One consequence was the emergence of worker nationalism. Chinese workers seemed particularly sensitive to encroachment on their interests by foreign employers and tended to link it to these employers’ "foreignness". Such a sense of national differences could serve as an instrument of trade unions to overcome their internal divisions and parochialism and to strengthen their solidarity within the workplace, to win the sympathy of their fellow compatriots at large, and to legitimize their existence and autonomous status against state control. Latent though it may be, the nationalistic sentiment was real and would burst out during certain moments in forms such as strikes and even outspoken anti-imperialistic campaigns like the May Thirtieth Movement. The above situation of Chinese trade unions in the warlord period will be elaborated in Part I of this study.

Part II deals with trade unions under the Nationalist regime from 1927 to 1949. With the end of warlord rule and the
rise of the Guomindang (GMD) or the Nationalist Party to national power in 1927-28 began the process of state-rebuilding or recentralization. The Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-shek was intrusive and certainly more effective than its warlord predecessors in dealing with social organizations. It may be assumed that under such a regime, autonomous associations as existed in the preceding period would be suffocated. However, this was not exactly what happened. Trade unions, especially those in foreign enterprises, operated quite autonomously in the 1930s and 1940s, the decades of Nationalist rule. The primary reason was that the Nationalist state was not unitary and homogeneous, but was characterized by constant divisions. Both the central government and local bureaucracies were plagued by rivalry among different organs or factions. Some state power-holders, in competition with others, turned to seek alliance with certain societal elements such as trade unions. As will be shown in this study, Nationalist city party branches attempted to mobilize workers as an ally in its power struggle with Nationalist city governments. Such divisions and competition inherent in the Nationalist state worked in favor of the preservation of trade unions' autonomy and popular character.

In addition to the disunity of the state, the vitality and autonomy of trade unions before 1949 were partly attributable to the presence of foreigners. On the one hand,
foreign capitalists (particularly Japanese), with the backing of their government agents in China, were able to frustrate the efforts of the Nationalist state power to penetrate their enterprises, thereby creating a space for trade unions to develop at the workplace with little or no Chinese political interference. On the other, the Chinese local authorities tended to be more tolerant of trade unions in foreign enterprises, primarily expecting them to counterbalance the influence of foreign capitalists and to win the workers' support. Such an understanding does not exclude the possibility that foreign capitalists and the Chinese state could collaborate with each other in suppressing trade unions, especially when the latter became too militant and were regarded as disturbing production, peace and social order. Generally, however, the competition between the Nationalist state and foreigners was congenial to the growth of trade unions in power and autonomy.

In the final chapter that makes up Part III of this study, I will briefly examine the fate of trade unions under Communist rule and focus on the post-Mao reform years. The communist victory in 1949 heralded the end of trade unions' golden age of autonomy. With the outgoing of the Nationalist regime and foreign capitalists, the Communist regime had no serious rivals at home and hence no longer required trade unions as its allies in political struggles against them.
Besides, it was powerful enough to dictate to them. During the period of socialism between the 1950s and early 1980s, trade unions were simply transformed into a state agency. They did not regain their popular character and relatively autonomous status until the post-Mao reform years.

During the urban reform since the 1980s, with the increasing differentiation of the working population into two distinct interest groups, workers and managerial elite, and especially the return of foreign businesses, the Chinese state found a useful ally in trade unions in mediating labor-management disputes and began to recognize the legitimacy of trade unions as workers' organizations with a certain autonomy. On the other hand, trade unions could use state resources to advance the interests of workers. Local governments, no matter how meddling, could act as patrons for some social groups and their organizations as well as individuals. No wonder local trade unions usually felt it desirable to "hook up" or attach to government organs. They hoped to get their "benevolent" support in dealing with the managerial elite.

In undertaking this research, I have benefitted from previous studies of Chinese labor history, particularly works by Jean Chesneaux, Emily Honig, Gall Hershatter, and Elizabeth Perry. Chesneaux's book is still the most detailed study of the Chinese labor movement in the period of 1919-1927. From a
Marxist perspective, he stresses the development of workers' "class consciousness" or "class solidarity" and their "political" (anti-imperialist and anti-feudal) motives in engaging in the labor movement and identifies the aims or interests of the workers and those of the Chinese Communist Party as the same. 3 Chesneaux's argument has faced challenges from a new generation of American labor historians, including Honig, Hershatter, and Perry. They all have rejected the argument that Chinese workers before 1949 had developed a "monolithic working-class consciousness". Instead, they have highlighted the divisions or fragmentation among workers along lines of native-place origin, gender, industrial sector, and division of labor, and the preponderant role of workers' pre-industrial experience (e.g., rural background and native-place societies) in shaping the workers' outlook on labor-capital relations and the nature of the labor movement. From this perspective, they belong, as Perry claims, to the school of "new labor history", "which emphasizes popular culture and shop-floor conditions". 4 On the other hand, these American scholars differ from each other as to how the fragmentation of workers affected the labor movement. While Honig and


4 Elizabeth J. Perry, Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor, p. 239.
Hershatter assert that such fragmentation militated against the development of "labor solidarity" and "unified labor activities", 5 Perry has found "a positive link between workers' fragmentation and their activism" and argues that the "divisions among Shanghai laborers generated systematic and long-standing solidarities" and "collective action". 6

These perspectives have enriched our understanding of workers and the labor movement in pre-1949 China and laid the foundation for future studies of this subject. In my opinion, instead of being antithetical to each other, these approaches can complement each other. The strength of the "new labor history" lies in that it reveals the continuity of laborers' experience and brings us back to the pre-industrial conditions (or traditions) in seeking the deeper roots of worker's behavior in a modern industrial world. In other words, this school avoids the pitfall of seeing the emergence of the modern industrial mode of production and the working class as an abrupt break from traditional society. Nevertheless, scholars of the new labor history still need to answer the question: why workers fraught with "divisions" and "fragmentation" could sometime come together and stage or


participate in large-scale (city-wide or nationwide) and concerted labor and even political-oriented movements? Perry attempts to tackle this issue, ascribing labor solidarity to the functioning of native place origin. The mechanism of native place origin may help cement solidarity among workers sharing common native places, but it does not explain collective actions of workers across native place boundaries.

By contrast, Chesneaux's approach places the labor movement in the context of capitalist mode of production, the "Chinese revolution", and even the "whole movement toward emancipation in all the Afro-Asian countries during the twentieth century", stressing changes in laborers' experience under the new capitalist system. Chesneaux focuses temporally on the period of 1919-27, which was indeed an era of recurring and influential revolutionary (and labor) movements, and geographically on southern provinces such as Guangdong, Hunan, and Jiangsu, where workers were politically mobilized by revolutionary forces more than anywhere else. (By contrast, Hershatter's Tianjin, known for being politically conservative, seldom underwent revolutionary changes; and Perry and Honig devote considerable space in their studies to the post-1927 years, which basically saw no open revolutionary

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activities and radical labor movements). Considering such historical background, there may be some truth in Chesneaux's argument that workers were transcending traditional barriers and cultivating some new sense of identity that could be defined as "class consciousness". Thus, Chesneaux's approach still has advantages for studying the Chinese labor movement, particularly in the revolutionary years, even though his identification of workers' interests with those of the Communist Party simplifies the political complexities of the labor movement.

Given the complexity of human nature and historical phenomena, I would assume that certain traditional patterns of behavior (native-place societies) of workers may not necessarily be incompatible with new ideas or feelings (class consciousness and nationalism); and they could coexist among the same group of workers. Feelings like class consciousness and nationalism usually are concealed and need special occasions, or "moments of crises" (a term borrowed from Timothy Brook ⁸) such as large scale strikes and anti-imperialist movements to be articulated; and such occasions are relatively few and short-lived. By contrast, some traditional practices such as native-place societies were closely linked to workers' routine work and life and therefore their concern for such practices was more often direct and

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⁸Timothy Brook, "Auto-organization in China"
visible. It is not surprising that some scholars find the functioning of native-place organizations more impressive than that of class consciousness and nationalism. What I suggest is that we need a balanced understanding of Chinese labor history and that both the "traditional" interpretation represented by Chesneaux and the new labor history have contributed to such understanding.

This study is concerned with trade unions and particularly their relations with dominant state power. Trade unions emerged in China, first of all, as a response to the workers' need for protecting their own interests from encroachment by employers. The development of modern capitalist industries and consequently the polarization and conflicts between hired laborers and capitalists played the fundamental role in shaping the nature of trade unions. Moreover, trade unions were influenced by traditional institutions such as guilds, native-place organizations, and gangs or secret societies, which lingered into and even thrived in modern times. Furthermore, we can not fully understand trade unions without taking into account their relations with the state and other political power contenders. It is this last aspect that constitutes the focus of this study. By applying the state-society paradigm as the basic theoretical framework, I intend to illuminate under what circumstances social organizations such as trade unions can
maintain their relative autonomous status and what their relations with the state can be like. The case of trade unions shows that in the Chinese context (in the absence of a democratic system), relatively autonomous social organizations are more likely to exist or survive in a competitive and pluralistic environment with various political and social forces checking one another; that competition and rivalry among these forces provide social organizations with a chance to make alliance with certain parties in promoting their own interests and maintaining their popular nature; and that the state-society relationship in the two periods (pre-1949 and post-Mao years) were not necessarily characterized by state domination.
Part I Trade Unions in the Warlord Period

Chapter 1 Trade Unions and Warlord Politics

Chinese trade unions made their first appearance in the early 20th century around the 1911 Revolution and boomed in the next two decades, especially during the May Fourth Movement, the May Thirtieth Movement and the Northern Expedition, from 1919 to 1927. These were also the years of warlord rule, which formally began with the death of Yuan Shikai, president of the "Republic" of China, in 1916 and ended with the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party (Guomindang--GMD) to national power in 1928 in the wake of the successful Northern Expedition (1926-1928). The warlord era was characterized by devolution of power and confrontation among different warlord cliques or factions, the most prominent of which were the Anhui, Zhili and Fengtian Cliques. Others included the Guangxi Clique and some warlord groups

The first worker organization relating to a modern industry was the Society for the Study of Mechanics (Jiqi yanjiu gonghui) founded in Canton in 1909, with the help of revolutionaries under Sun Yat-sen. Properly speaking, it was a mixed organization with its membership from both employers and workers. In 1913, it became a genuine labor organization, known as the Canton Mechanics' Union, drawing its membership only from workers. The first group of "spontaneous" trade unions that were formed by workers (seamen, railwaymen, rickshaw pullers in Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou) on their own initiative emerged in 1912. See Jean Chesneaux, The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927, p. 119; Wang Yongxi et al., Zhongguo gonghui shi (A history of Chinese trade unions) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 45 and 48.
that derived from the above major cliques such as Feng Yuxiang.\textsuperscript{10} Commanding their own military forces and territories and controlling the central government located in Beijing, these warlords can be regarded as holders of state power. Other important power contenders included the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party. The coexistence of all these forces created a situation of competition and mutual check among themselves, which favored the growth of trade unions as workers' organizations.

1. Wu Peifu and Trade Unions

In the period under discussion, Chinese politics was dominated alternately by three major warlord cliques, Zhili, Anhui and Fengtian, altogether known as Beiyang warlords. Power-hungry and unscrupulous, these warlords were constantly engaged in warfare with one another for seizing the national power based in Beijing and for expanding their control of territories, people and wealth. Realizing that their influence primarily depended on military means, the warlords took it as their priority to preserve and expand the armed forces at their disposal. By nature, they were hostile to popular organizations and regarded them as a threat to their

authority. However, this did not mean that they totally ignored the importance of societal forces such as workers as potential allies. To get the upper hand in contending for power with their rivals, some warlords deemed it expedient to win workers’ support by making concessions to them, specifically by tolerating their efforts to form labor organizations. Such tolerance would benefit the unionization of workers, although it depended upon the favor of individual warlords rather than the law. In fact, no formal labor legislation was passed under warlord rule to acknowledge trade unions’ status as workers’ organizations. The warlord Beijing government only promulgated a draft trade union regulation in July 1925, which allowed workers to form trade unions and recognized them as legitimate.\textsuperscript{11} The regulation was little more than a dead letter under the circumstances of constant warfare and political instability. Even the authority of the warlord Beijing regime itself was challenged from time to time. Moreover, the tolerance shown by individual warlords to trade unions was quite limited. It was only an expediency and depended on whether such tolerance could facilitate warlords’ interests. Most warlords would not hesitate to resort to

\textsuperscript{11} "Gonghui tiaoli caoan" (The draft regulation on trade unions) (1925), in Liu Mingkui (ed), Zhongguo gongren jieji lishi zhuangkuang (The historical situation of Chinese working class) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1985), pp. 734-742.
brutally suppressive measures in dealing with workers and their organizations if they felt challenged or threatened by the latter. Despite these hazards, the very fragmentation of a warlord regime did provide some room for trade union activism. On this point, I will first refer to the example of Wu Peifu and his relations with workers.

Wu was the most powerful warlord of the Zhili clique in the early 1920s, controlling most northern provinces and territories along the Beijing-Hankou Railway. With military unification of the country as his political goal, Wu was first concerned to secure his monopoly of railways as an important source of revenues and a critical communication line for troop movements. However, he found that many railway administrative personnel were actually members of the Communications Faction (jiaotong xi) \(^\text{12}\), who maintained close connection with his deadly rival--the Fengtian clique under Zhang Zuolin. These people often attempted to undermine Wu's power by making trouble on the railway. So Wu Peifu considered it imperative

\[^\text{12}\] This faction's origins can be traced to the late Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications, which was staffed by followers of Yuan Shikai. The faction's leader was Liang Shiyi (1869-1933), who from 1906 to 1916 served as director-generals of the Railway Bureau and the Bank of Communications as well as a series of high government posts. At the end of 1921, he was appointed by Zhang Zuolin, leader of the Fengtian Clique, as prime minister of the Beijing government. The faction's influence lay in railway administration and finance. See John K. Fairbank (ed), The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), vol. 12, part I, pp. 272-273, and 313.
to expel them from the railway administration. On the other hand, he did not feel it desirable to do this by force in view of the Communications Faction's powerful influence. As a more cautious tactic, Wu Peifu turned to seek an alliance with workers. In the wake of his war with the Fengtian clique in 1922, Wu Peifu formally announced a "labor protection" policy and adopted a laissez faire attitude towards the formation of trade unions. Upon the recommendation of Li Dazhao, the leading Communist theoretician of the early 1920s, Wu appointed six "secret inspectors", who turned out to be Communists, to collect information on irregularities and abuses in the administration of railways as excuses to remove members of the Communications Faction and to replace them with Wu's own followers. Taking advantage of their special position as "inspectors" and under the camouflage of conducting the mission assigned by Wu, the secret inspectors moved back and forth along various railways free of charge. Instead of targeting Wu's foes, however, they were preoccupied with mobilizing workers, expressing workers' demands to the railway administrations, and particularly, organizing trade unions among railway workers. 13 On the other hand, encouraged by Wu's "generous" labor policy, those trade unions previously operating clandestinely emerged from underground and many

"worker clubs" came to formally assume the name of trade unions. Consequently, trade unions mushroomed in cities along various railways under Wu Peifu. Along the Beijing-Hankou line alone, there were sixteen trade unions with a membership of 20,000 in 1922. They actively advocated improvement of workers' economic conditions and particularly organized strikes. As Zhang Guotao, the then principal Communist leader in charge of labor movements, commented, "The labor movement is experiencing an unprecedented golden age in major railway stations and cities along railway lines".

The above trade unions could be identified as autonomous in the sense that they, free from the manipulation of the state represented by warlords, championed workers' interests. Although some Communists had managed to infiltrate and worked with trade unions, their role was minimal in mobilizing workers at this stage. In infancy itself and few, they were far from able to influence the vast masses of workers in any significant ways and to dominate agendas of trade union activities. It was also evident that these trade unions did not succumb to the power of warlord Wu Peifu. They fought for

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14 Xiang Ying, "Erqi shilue" (A brief account of the February Seventh Incident", in The All-China Federation of Trade Unions et al., (eds.) Erqi da bagong ziliao xuanbian (Selected compilation of materials on the great February Seventh Strike) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1983), pp. 584-589. (originally in Hongse zhonghua (Red China), February 3, 1932.

15 Zhang Guotao, Wo de huiyi (My recollections), vol. 1, pp. 264.
their own interests rather than for fulfilling the warlord’s "missions".

Nevertheless, the trade unions were not secure with their autonomous status, especially when they became strong and militant, provoking the warlord authorities’ suspicion and fear. As shown above, Wu Peifu originally expected to exploit workers’ support in confronting his warlord rivals. It turned out, however, that the mobilized workers, instead of supporting the warlord, posed troubles (particularly strikes) for him and that increasingly expanding trade unions tended to eclipse his authority. In February of 1923, the sixteen trade unions along the Beijing-Hankou Railway decided to form a federation in order to coordinate workers’ movements. The inaugural ceremony and a rally were scheduled to take place at the city of Zhengzhou of Henan Province on February 7, 1923. Initially, Wu Peifu did not openly show his opposition to the formation of a general trade union, but he insisted that the ceremony be cancelled or be held in another locality, for Zhengzhou, as a military zone, was not proper for large-scale rallies. He threatened that he would not sit idle if workers disregarded his suggestion. However, trade union leaders chose to ignore Wu’s warning and went on with their schedule, claiming the formation of the Beijing-Hankou Railway Federation of Trade Unions in Zhengzhou. When Wu Peifu sent troops to dissolve it, the newly founded Federation called for
a general strike along Beijing-Hankou line. What happened next was the so-called "February Seventh Massacre" involving a military crackdown on the strike, the shut-down of trade unions, and the random killing and arrest of workers and union leaders. 16 The Chinese workers' movement suffered its first serious setback.

Several findings can be drawn from the case of the relations between Wu Peifu as a warlord politician and the Beijing-Hankou Railway trade unions. First, certain state power holders and social organizations could form temporary partnerships based on the principle of mutual benefit and exploitation. Such partnership was, however, expedient and hence uneasy and fragile, susceptible to changes in balance of power. Secondly, such partnership was unequal with the state power having the upper hand. In a weaker position and without any effective legal protection, social organizations were vulnerable to the whims of state authorities and could face repression if their activities exceeded the limits of tolerance by state authorities. Thirdly, Chinese workers and trade unions, once mobilized, tended to become militant and uncompromising even on minor matters, which may partly account

16 The Secretariat of Chinese Labor Organizations, "Erqi tusha guocheng" (The course of February Seventh Massacre), in the All China Federation of Trade Unions et al., (eds.) Erqi da bagong ziliao xuanbian (Selected compilation of materials on the great February Seventh Strike), pp. 199-209. (originally in Xiangdao [Guide], no. 20, February 27, 1923).
for tragedies like the "February Seventh Massacre" in the history of Chinese labor movement. As described above, originally, Wu Peifu did not abruptly reject the unions' demand for forming a federation of trade unions, though he disliked it. Had union leaders shown some flexibility simply by changing the locality for the inaugural ceremony of the federation or cancelling it, as Wu suggested (ordered), the warlord would not have found an immediate excuse to use military suppression. Wu clearly felt his authority challenged with his orders rejected by workers. He was also worried that large-scale rallies would cause disorder in his major military base, Zhengzhou. What I mean here is that the union leaders might have been flexible in dealing with strong-willed politicians like Wu and thus been able to avoid unnecessary sacrifice.

Shortly after the February Seventh Massacre, the Chinese labor movement was at a low ebb under the warlord pressure in northern China. Many trade unions were closed down and survivors had to go underground. However, the warlord regime's control of workers was far from effective, as it remained deeply fragmented. Such fragmentation, especially the contradictions between the warlord-controlled Beijing government and local authorities, provided trade unions with plenty of chances to stage a comeback. The establishment of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway Trade Union in 1925 is illustrative
in this respect.

2. Formation of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union

Railways weighed heavily in the minds of various warlords and were a major object they fought for with each other. Warlords depended on railways for both revenues and transportation of troops. Among the most important railways of the time was the Jiaozhou-Jinan line with its administration headquarters located in Qingdao of Shandong Province. After being returned to the warlord-controlled Beijing government in 1923, the railway administration was plagued by power struggles between two groups, the so-called Jiang-Zhe (Jiangsu-Zhejiang) faction and Shandong faction. The former consisted of people from the provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang and constituted the upper echelon of the railway administrative personnel. The latter was composed of Shandong natives, assuming middle- and lower-level positions. Such a division came out of the warlord-dominated Beijing government’s policy to check the local interests of Shandong provincial authorities and particularly to forestall the

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17 The Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway, linking Qingdao and Jinan, was built by Germans in 1904 and remained under their administration till 1914. From 1914 to 1923, it was controlled by Japanese. In January 1923, the railway was redeemed by the Chinese (Beijing) government. See Qingdao shi zhi: Jiaotong zhi (Qingdao city gazetteer: transportation) (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1995), pp. 14-18.
latter's control of the railway. Backed by the Beijing government, the Jiang-Zhe faction attempted to squeeze out all administrators of Shandong origins. Moreover, the Beijing government planned to unify railway freight rates and abolish the preferential rates that had been set by the Japanese and in favor of local interests. To counteract such an effort, the Shandong provincial authorities under the province's military governor lent its support to the Shandong faction within the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway administration. The latter, always ready to redress their "grievances", quickly seized upon this opportunity. Under the slogan of "Shandong people rule Shandong", they called for the expulsion of the "Jiang-Zhe" faction from the railway administration. The call gained enthusiastic support from various circles in Shandong and particularly Qingdao, including workers, business associations and provincial assemblymen as well as associations of Shandong natives in Beijing. A general strike was held along the railway from February 8 to 11 1925, involving not only railway workers and staff but also business people. Eventually, the Beijing government was forced to dismiss the two heads of the Jiang-Zhe faction as directors of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway Administration Bureau and replaced them with persons recommended by the Shandong provincial authorities. 18

18 "Minguo shisi nian de bagong" (The 1925 strike), in the Offices for Labor movement Study (attached to Shandong General
Thus, the factional wrangling over the arrangement of Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway administrative personnel ended up with the victory of Shandong elite and had little to do with advancement of ordinary workers' welfare. However, the events were significant for workers' movement in that they helped mobilize workers and created a moment for their action. This was exactly what happened in the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant attached to the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway.

The plant, with about 1,585 Chinese workers in 1925, was one of the largest modern factories in Qingdao. As early as 1923, its workers began to form their own organizations. The most influential among them was the so-called "Christian Society", a guild-style organization founded in 1923 by workers of two occupations of the plant, carpentry and ironwork (blacksmith) in accordance with the principle of "making friendly contacts and providing mutual aid". Its head was elected and funds came from donations by its members. 19 Under the camouflage of worshipping "founders of crafts (zushi)" and celebrating holidays such as Christmas, the

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Trade Union and the Qingdao Trade Union) (eds.), Qingdao canan shiliao (Historical materials on the Qingdao massacre) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1985), pp. 287-289; Pingmin ribao (Populace' Daily), January 12, 14, 1925; Chenbao, January 31, February 23, 26, 1925.

society often organized gatherings and discussed issues relating to workers' welfare. It took it upon itself to solve contradictions among workers and to mediate disputes between workers and foremen primarily on the former's behalf. Its active advocacy of workers' interests earned wide support from workers and its influence soon expanded to most other workshops. Meanwhile, the Christian Society attracted the attention of underground Communists, who were anxiously seeking allies to work with. Some of them indeed infiltrated the society, yet their influence was minimal. They had to work behind the scenes and respect the opinions of the society's leaders. What they could do was to assist them in setting up workers' clubs and libraries and spread ideas about "class divisions and struggles". The only manifest effect of Communist influence was that the Society became more outspoken and more militant. It went beyond moderate techniques such as bargaining with the management and resorted to relatively radical ones, strikes for example. In so doing, however, the Society incurred suspicion and repression from the railway administration and Qingdao's warlord authorities. Failing in their efforts to sabotage the Society through "divide and rule", the railway officials turned to high-handed measures. They fired the Society's four leading figures and banned all its activities in the spring of 1924 under the pretext that it had been manipulated by Communists. The Christian Society,
though still in existence, had to operate underground. In the long run, however, the fragmentation and divisions inherent with the warlord state power compromised its effectiveness in suppressing social organizations like the Christian Society (a trade union in substance).

The chance came for the Christian Society to resurface when the warlord factional struggle over the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway administration and the elite-led railway strike broke out. Workers and the Christian Society at the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant immediately joined in the strike, for their own interests of course. Among other things, they demanded an increase in wages and legitimization of trade unions, but only found that such demands were neglected by the railway authorities. Therefore, as soon as the scramble between warlord factions for railway administration subsided and the elite-engendered strike ended, the Christian Society mobilized workers of the Rolling Stock Plant to stage another strike, which lasted six days. They resumed work only when the newly-installed railway administration gave in and accepted their demands. Consequently, workers formally announced, at a public celebration assembly, the establishment of the Rolling Stock

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20 Fu Shutang, "Sifang jichang shengdan hui de douzheng"; Ding Juqi, "Sifang jichang, rishang shachang gongren de jici bagong douzheng" (Strikes at the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant and Japanese Cotton Mills), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2, pp. 343-352.
Plant Trade Union and on its basis the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union. 

During the warlord period, railways and factories attached to them such as the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant were owned and managed directly by the warlord state. This means that railway workers and trade unions were directly confronted with state agencies. The state controlled most important resources, especially military forces, and seemed much stronger than workers. As indicated above, however, the warlord state, handicapped by rampant and debilitating factional struggles, was unable to deal effectively with workers directly in its employ and had to make concessions to them, particularly allowing them to form trade unions. Then what about labor movements, especially union activities, in non-state or private enterprises, where workers were not directly faced with state power? My hypothesis is that in these enterprises workers could have more chance to organize

21 Fu Shutang, "Guanyu sifang jichang gongren yundong de huiyi" (My recollections on workers’ movement at the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao (Materials on Qingdao’s party history) (Qingdao, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 335-343; Sun Bingyue, Qingdao zhi--shetuan zhi (Gazetteer of Qingdao: social organizations) (Qingdao, 1992), p. 2.
trade unions due to lack of direct state intervention. On this point, I take workers' activities in cotton mills at Qingdao as an example.

3. Trade Unions and the First Joint Cotton Mill Worker Strike in Qingdao

The cotton textile industry was the backbone of Qingdao's economy during the warlord period and it was largely monopolized by the Japanese. From 1916 to 1923, the Japanese set up six cotton mills in Qingdao and owned 240,000 spindles, which accounted for 90% of the city's total spindles. They employed 18,000 Chinese workers, making up 70% of all the city's industrial labor force. As in other industries and enterprises, the Chinese workers in the Japanese cotton mills were fraught with divisions primarily based on their different regional origins. Two basic groups, namely "locals" and "outsiders", could be easily identified. The locals were from Qingdao proper and the suburban areas. Most of them were child workers and illiterate. Moreover, they found their jobs largely through the "recommendation" of Chinese foremen in the Japanese cotton mills. So inherently they succumbed to twofold restraints: ignorance (or illiteracy) and, more importantly,

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dependence on foremen. The latter usually maintained wide connections and some influence in the local society. Some of them were heads of villages and hence members of local elite. They not only exercised control over "local" workers within factories, but also could make their pressure felt by workers outside factories. With such restraints, the "locals" were usually docile and passive when it came to engaging in labor activism. The other group of workers, the "outsiders", came from other rural areas within Shandong province, particularly from counties such as Jiaoxian, Gaomi, Jimo, Pingdu, Qingzhou, Putai and Laiyang. Among these "outsiders" were workers whom the Japanese cotton mill owners (especially in Dakang Cotton Mill) recruited specifically as "probationers" (shixi sheng). They had largely been school students or young people with some education. The Japanese cotton mill owners employed them with the intention of training them into technical personnel. In Dakang Cotton Mill alone, there were about 400 such "probationers" in 1923. 23 Compared to the "locals", the "outsiders", free from bonds to local elite such as foremen and with some literacy, were less docile in their relations with employers and more likely to get involved in labor movements. Actually, it was the "probationers" who constituted

the leadership of union activities in Japanese cotton mills.

The Japanese cotton mill owners were known for their harshness in maintaining labor discipline and controlling the workplace. They always kept a close watch on workers' activities and subjected workers to various kinds of supervision. In one workshop, for example, they could maintain three levels of control. The first level was under a Japanese manager, who exercised general supervision of the workshop. The second level of control was assumed by three to five Chinese "senior foremen". With the confidence and favor of Japanese owners and managers, these "senior foremen" took the primary responsibilities of overseeing workers. Below them were "junior foremen", eight to ten in number, in charge of the third level of control. While enjoying some privileges and power over ordinary workers, they themselves had to work and sometimes suffered bullying from the Japanese manager and Chinese "senior foremen". Such a system of control partly came out of the technique of "divide and rule", which Japanese employers particularly favored in keeping workers fragmented and forestalling any united action. Moreover, the Japanese cotton mill employers encouraged workers to live in factory

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dormitories, for guaranteeing workers' timely attendance at work and for the convenience of supervising workers' activities as well. 25 Beside such regular administration, the management of Dakang Cotton Mill adopted a unique system, the so-called "guardianship", for effective control of workers. Under the system of guardianship, a Chinese "guardian" (or "protector") was chosen and assigned the duties of recruiting workers from a certain county and of supervising not only their work but also daily life during their apprenticeship. Particularly, the "guardian" took charge of workers' board and pay. Workers' pay did not go directly to workers but to their guardians. In other words, the guardians kept the pay on workers' behalf. Actually, workers' pay amounted to some kind of security. If workers were found breaking labor discipline or participating in labor movement, they would lose income. 26

Such measures show that Japanese business people were extremely concerned with maintaining labor discipline and therefore enhancing the profitability of their enterprises. Most importantly, they indicated that the Japanese management kept a high degree of vigilance towards workers and attempted to prevent any labor unrest by isolating workers from outside

25 Li Mingxian, op. cit.

influence and keeping them divided or fragmented. Obviously, the strict supervision by the management constituted an obstacle to labor mobilization and particularly to workers' efforts to organize trade unions. Another hindrance was that workers in Japanese enterprises were usually paid slightly higher wages than in Chinese enterprises; the working conditions in Japanese factories were better than in their Chinese counterparts. Nevertheless, these obstacles were by no means insurmountable. Instead, they could be counteracted by other factors such as Chinese nationalism, instigation or influence from without, and the reluctance or inability of fragmented state power to quickly react to or suppress labor movements in foreign businesses. It turned out that workers in foreigners' employ, once mobilized, could be more militant and their unrest more lasting than in Chinese-owned enterprises. This was testified by the three general worker strikes in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills following the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway worker strike that led to the formation of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union.

The cotton mill strikes started in the Dakang Cotton Mill and then spread to all other Japanese cotton mills in Qingdao, lasting for one and half months and involving about 18,000 workers. They evolved primarily around the issue of trade unions. Specifically, the strikes were a direct response to the Japanese management's attempts to dissolve trade unions.
that workers treasured as their own organizations and as representatives of their own interests.

The workers in Dakang Cotton Mill, encouraged by the success of Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway workers in establishing the General Trade Union in February of 1925, began to secretly organize their own unions in March of the same year. The initiative came from "probationers", who proved willing and able to take the lead in the labor movement, primarily due to their literacy and sensitivity to encroachment on their interests by the management. The messages they used in mobilizing workers were economic and concerned with such matters as wage increase, job security, eight-hour workday, improvement of housing conditions, and allowance of lunch break. These were the primary concerns of workers and could easily arouse workers' enthusiasm and support for trade unions. By the end of March, the trade union membership in Dakang Cotton mill was around 800, and increased to 2,000 in early April. Meanwhile, trade unions were also emerging in the other five Japanese cotton mills, Naigai Wata Kaisha, Longxing, Zhongyuan, Changqi and Fuji.

Japanese employers regarded the formation of trade unions

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27 Zhu Zihong, "Yijiu erwu nian gongren bagong douzheng" (Worker trikes in 1925); "Qingdao riban shachang gongren bagong qingkuang" (Worker strikes in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills) (translated by Zhou Dongping et al., from Japanese), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2, pp. 296-306.
as intolerable, for they always saw organized labor as a potential source of troubles and a formidable enemy. So as soon as they detected signs of union activities in their enterprise, the Japanese owners of Dakang Cotton Mill decided to strike first in order to nip the trade unions in the bud. On April 12, 1925, they ordered a surprise search of the dormitories of workers and discovered a list of secret trade union members and other union documents as well. Later, three worker representatives went to the management to protest the dormitory search, but only found themselves detained by the management. Such events provoked a strong protest from the mill’s trade union. On April 18, the trade union raised twenty-one demands to the management and requested a reply within twenty-four hours, threatening that it would otherwise go on strike. The first and also the most important among the demands was that the trade union be recognized as workers’ legitimate organization. When these demands were turned down by the Japanese employers, a general strike ensued in Dakang Cotton Mill on April 19, with participants amounting to 5,000.

The strike was well organized with a special strike

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28 Zhou Dongping et al. (translated from Japanese), "Qingdao riben shachang gongren bagong qingkuang" (Worker Strikes in Qingdao’s Japanese cotton mills), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2, pp. 296-306; Shenyao, April 22, 1925; Minguo Ribao, April 24, 1925.
committee, which primarily consisted of trade union activists, assuming the leadership. Under it were 30 worker pickets with 300 members. Besides, trade unions set up "teams of investigation and propaganda". To win the sympathy and support of workers in other factories and the public, the strike committee organized worker parades and demonstrations, publicizing workers' grievances and suffering as well as the Japanese maltreatment of Chinese workers. Such techniques proved effective. In the following days, workers in the other five Japanese cotton mills went on strike in support of the Dakang workers. The Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union formed a Committee for Supporting Qingdao Cotton Mill Workers on Strike and collected donations for the strikers. Positive responses also came from other places. Trade unions of the Tianjin-Pukou and Beijing-Hankou Railways all expressed their support for Qingdao cotton mill workers in forms of public statements and donations. Worker representatives from Shanghai cotton mills indicated that they would stage "sympathetic strikes" if Qingdao's Japanese cotton mill owners did not

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29 Among them were Si Mingzhang, Su Meiyi, and Li Jingquan. All of them were "outsiders" and "probationers" in Dakang cotton mill. Si was from the county of Pingyin, Su from the city of Jining and Li from Jinan. They had played the major role in organizing trade unions in Japanese cotton mills. They were neither CCP members nor did they have any connections with other parties or secret societies when they took the strike's leadership. See brief biographies of Li Jingquan, Su Meiyi and Si Mingzhang, in Qingdao canan shiliao, pp. 441-444, 463-464.
accept workers' demands. In Jinan, organizations of "various circles" (gejie), besides providing financial support to the strikers, appealed to the Shandong provincial authorities to negotiate with Japanese consuls and cotton mill employers on workers' demands and to press them to make concessions to workers. 30

For their part, the Japanese employers were initially unyielding and even bellicose. They manoeuvred all resources at their disposal to sabotage the strike. Some Japanese employers (Fuji Cotton Mill and Lingmu Silk Mill) announced lockouts and forced workers to return to their native places. Others favored the technique of "divide and rule". They recruited "scabs" and had them infiltrate trade unions, gathering information and sowing discord among union members. They also bought over some workers and set up new labor organizations under the management, using them as a counterbalance to trade unions. Furthermore, all the six Japanese cotton mill owners brought their case to the Japanese government and requested its intervention. In turn, the Japanese envoy in Beijing and the Japanese general consul in Qingdao lodged protests respectively with the Beijing warlord government and Shandong authorities, urging them to stop the strike. 31

30 Minguo ribao, April 26, 1925; Chenbao, April 4, 1925.
31 Chenbao, April 30, 1925; Minguo ribao, April 30, 1925.
Under Japanese pressure, the Beijing government did act firmly, ordering the Qingdao authorities to immediately suppress the strikers. However, there was little chance that the order could be carried out by the Qingdao authorities, primarily due to the fragmentation and volatility of the warlord politics. Since being returned to the Chinese administration, Qingdao had been under different warlord factions. The city's importance as a naval base and as a source of revenues made it coveted by all political forces, particularly warlords. As a result, Qingdao's highest administrative position, the so-called Jiaoao Superintendent (Jiaoao duban), changed hands frequently. When the cotton mill worker strikes occurred, Qingdao was being co-administered by Wang Hanzhang and Wen Shude connected to

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32 Jiaoao Superintendents from 1922 to 1929 included the following figures.
Xiong Bingqi (December 1922-April 1924) in close connection with the Zhili Clique's chieftain Cao Kun;
Gao Enhong (April 1924-November 1924), a trusted follower of another Zhili Clique chieftain Wu Peifu;
Wang Hanzhang (November 5-November 15, 1924), who was appointed by Shandong governor Zheng Shiqi (the Anhui Clique);
Wen Shude (November 1924-July 1925), concurrently commander-in-chief of the Bohai fleet, who was connected to the Zhili Clique and later changed his loyalty to Zhang Zengchang of the Fengtian Clique.
Zhao Qi (July 1925-April 1929).
See Qingdao canan shiliao (Historical materials on the Qingdao Massacre, p. 478).
Shandong governor Zheng Shiqi and Wu Peifu respectively. Wang and Wen were engaged in overt and covert power struggles, each aspiring to get the upper hand. Meanwhile, both feared that Qingdao would be lost to the Fengtian Clique warlords, whose troops were advancing speedily southwards along Tianjin-Pukou Railway. Under such circumstances, neither Wang Hanzhang nor Wen Shude, as Qingdao’s co-administrator, had the time and interest in taking high-handed policies towards strikes. Such policies would have incurred hatred from the public. In short, the high frequency of turnover in Qingdao’s administration and the rampant factional struggles among warlords rendered Chinese political authorities at Qingdao unwilling to create new enemies in popular forces and ineffectual in suppressing popular movements like worker strikes.

Without the active cooperation of Chinese local authorities, the Japanese cotton mill owners had no other choice but to give in. They could not afford more losses from further stoppage. With the mediation of local elite including Qingdao’s police chief and head of the Chamber of Commerce, Japanese employers made concessions to workers such as increasing subsidies for meals, providing compensation for

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33 Zheng Shiqi, originally connected to the Anhui Clique, declared neutrality of Shandong province during the second Zhili-Fengtian War (1924). Unable to monopolize the administration of Qingdao, however, Zheng had to share his power with Wen Shude (the Zhili Clique). See Shenbao, November 12, 1924.
workers who were injured at work and their medical fees, allowing a thirty-minute lunch break, and forbidding personal insults to workers. However, they did not accept that trade unions were legitimate in their enterprises. 34 Despite this, workers resumed work. However, the reconciliation between workers and Japanese cotton mill employers turned out to be short-lived. Some of their major differences, especially over the issue of trade unions, remained unresolved and would soon lead to another round of serious confrontation between workers and Japanese employers.

4. The Second Joint Cotton Mill Worker Strike in Qingdao: Defending Trade Unions

The fact that the first cotton mill worker strike was led by trade unions and ended with concessions from the Japanese employers greatly enhanced unions' prestige and influence among workers. In the wake of the strike, trade unions became more militant and uncompromising and more actively involved in expanding their power base and organizing workers. They set up labor schools for educating workers and particularly for training union activists and leaders; they also set up regular funds for union activities. Such developments further antagonized Japanese employers and reinforced their fear of

more labor unrest. To undermine the influence of trade unions, the owners of three Japanese cotton mills, Dakang, Naigai Wata Kaisha and Longxiong, connived in dismissing fifty-one workers with leading union positions. As a countercheck, trade unions enlisted these dismissed workers as full-time union staff members. The latter remained outside the cotton mills but had more time than before to spend on union work. Even though refusing to acknowledge the unions' legitimacy, Japanese cotton owners were forced to have contact with unions. If they attempted to bypass unions and chose to deal directly with workers on workers' affairs, they would meet rebuffs from workers: "On this, you need to consult with trade unions. We listen to the unions." Indeed, trade unions in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills became so powerful that, as a contemporary Japanese analyst commented, "Workers followed all advice and orders from trade unions, while totally ignoring the management's authority". "To the managerial staff newly appointed by (Japanese) companies, workers paid no attention at all, claiming that they only took orders from trade unions". The growing militancy of trade unions again had to do with the weakness of and tolerance from Chinese political authorities especially at the local level. The

Qingdao authorities' attitude towards trade unions was ambivalent. On the one hand, it maintained the official stand that the formation of trade unions was not allowed without official approval. On the other, it turned a blind eye on the emergence of unions and remained inactive in dealing with their activities. The reason behind such inactivity was still that the local regime fraught with internal divisions did not want to alienate unnecessarily workers as a societal force. In commenting on the high frequency of strikes and militancy of Chinese workers in these years, a contemporary Japanese deputy consul at Qingdao properly pointed out, "In present China, orders from the central government go almost nowhere; different regions and various factions are fighting against each other without one day of peace. Many people do not have free time and real interest in mediating those strikes in which they have no big stake. When these strikes involve foreigners, the (Chinese) authorities would rather go along with the populace, due to the pressure of patriotic and rights-recovery movements".  

The Japanese employers, in the face of the increasingly influential and militant trade unions and a unified labor force, had no choice but turned again to press the Chinese

36 Wang Qin (translated from Japanese), Zuijin zhongguo bagong qingkuang (Recent strikes in China) (August 1925), in Qingdao canan shiliao (Historical materials on the Qingdao Massacre), pp. 291-303.
authorities, particularly requesting the banning of all trade unions in their enterprises. Similarly, the Japanese ambassador in Beijing and consuls in Jinan and Qingdao all tried to bring pressure to bear upon different levels of Chinese government. Under repeated Japanese pressure, the Qingdao authorities felt it difficult to evade its "responsibility". On May 15, 1925, three hundred Chinese policemen were sent to Japanese cotton mills. What they did was only symbolic: taking down the signboards of trade unions and asking union workers to change the name of "trade unions" into that of "clubs". The Chinese police, on the one hand, did attempt to appease the angry Japanese employers, but, on the other, they were reluctant to offend Chinese workers and trade unions. However, even such moderate action by the police provoked unions and workers, as the latter immediately went on strike. Workers came in large numbers to surround the policemen and requested return of union signboards while condemning the police chief Chen Tao as "a Japanese running dog". This episode lasted about six hours and came to an end only when the police gave in and put back the union signboards. 37 More militant than ever, workers took control of several Japanese cotton mills and prevented Japanese

37 Chenbao, May 28, 1925; "Qingdao tusha zhi jingguo, mudi zai xiaomie gonghui" (The Qingdao Massacre: to eliminate trade Unions), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2, pp. 67-72. (originally in Xiangdao, no. 120-121).
managers from entering. Unfortunately, workers and trade union leaders could not anticipate the high price that they would pay for their unusual militancy and defiance, partly due to changes in the balance of political power in Shandong with the coming of Zhang Zongchang.

Zhang was a military general of the Fengtian Clique (warlords). With its victory over the Zhili Clique during the Second Zhili-Fengtian War in late 1924, the Fengtian Clique gained ascendancy in north and central China. On May 2, 1925, the Fengtian Clique-controlled "central" government in Beijing appointed Zhang Zongchang as military governor of Shandong province, replacing Zheng Shiqi of the Anhui Clique. 38 Zhang was known for his cruelty and unscrupulousness and, above all, for his pro-Japanese stand. So his assumption of Shandong's military governorship was welcomed by the Japanese. Particularly, the latter found in Zhang a solution to the problem of labor unrest in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills. On May 27, 1925, the Japanese envoy proposed to the warlord Beijing government that troops under Zhang Zongchang be charged with the duty of suppressing labor movements and protecting Japanese residents. Meanwhile, the Japanese, ready

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38 Liu Zihong, "Zhang Zongchang zai junfa hunzhan zhong suo banyan de jiaoese" (Zhang Zongchang's role in the tangled warfare among warlords), in Wenshi ziliao xuanji (Compilation of literary and historical materials) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1981), no. 11, pp. 119-152.
to use their own military forces, dispatched two destroyers to Qingdao. 39 Fearing Japanese military intervention, the Beijing government accepted the Japanese proposal and ordered Zhang Zongchang to summarily suppress Qingdao’s strikes.

As far as Zhang was concerned, to suppress the worker strike in Qingdao provided him with a good chance to expand his own power to that city. When Zhang first took over the Shandong governorship in early May of 1925, Qingdao was still outside his jurisdiction. Like all of his predecessors, he coveted the wealth of Qingdao and the naval forces there and aspired to take possession of it. Moreover, Zhang expected, through suppressing the labor movement, to curry favor with the Japanese and enlist Japanese support in contending for power with other warlords and ensuring his supremacy in Shandong. Specifically he needed Japanese weapons and loans. Therefore, Zhang seized upon the chance and immediately dispatched troops under a brigade commander to Qingdao. 40

Then what about the Qingdao authorities? As the city’s chief administrator, Jiaozao Superintendent Wen Shude was first concerned with maintaining his power position. He had just lost his backing with the defeat of the Zhili Clique and the departure of former Shandong governor Zheng Shiqi. What was most pressing for him was to find a new patron. Given that

39 Shenbao, May 29, 30, 1925.
40 Chenbao, June 1, 1925.
Zhang Zongchang, with favor from the Japanese, was prospering in Shandong and would probably be a decisive force in China, Wen Shude deemed it expedient to throw his lot with Zhang and decided to go along with the latter in suppressing workers. No matter how unscrupulous, however, Wen was afraid of being condemned alone as a "butcher". So he turned to Zhang Zongchang, asking for instructions on how to deal with Qingdao's strikes. Zhang replied, "Although assembly and association are allowed by the constitution, they require prior application (to political authorities) for doing so. (In dealing with those assemblies and associations) without prior application, local authorities have the discretion to maintain public order by using force if necessary." 41 Apparently, Zhang was here approving military suppression of the strikes under the pretext of dissolving unauthorized trade unions and restoring public order.

On May 29, 1925, Wen Shude and Wang Hanzhang deployed about 2,000 armed policemen, surrounding three Japanese cotton mills (Dakang, Naigai Wata Kaisha, and Longxing) and workers' residence. When they failed in forcing workers out of workshops, the policemen opened fire. Eight workers were killed on the spot, seventeen heavily wounded, and more

41 "Zhang Zongchang fu Wen Shude midian" (A cipher telegram from Zhang Zongchang to Wen Shude), in Qingdao canan shiliao, p. 264.
lightly wounded. In addition, the police arrested 69 workers and listed another 200 as wanted. They went on to close down trade unions and, in collaboration with Japanese cotton mill owners, forced 500 workers back to their native places. This event was known as the "Qingdao Massacre" in Chinese history.

The next day, May 30, 1925, a similar event occurred in Shanghai. The story went back to mid-May of 1925. The management of a Japanese cotton mill (Naigai Wata Kaisha) announced a lockout when workers went on strike against the dismissal of two Chinese workers. During the dispute, the Japanese in the cotton mill opened fire on workers, shooting one (Gu Zhenghong) to death and wounded eight. The incident provoked a citywide protest. On May 30, students and people from other walks of life held demonstrations and ran into conflict with British policemen. The latter killed more than ten Chinese. This was the so-called "May Thirtieth Massacre". The two incidents in Qingdao and Shanghai together were then known as "Qingdao-Shanghai Massacres". They immediately sparked a nationalistic movement in China, specifically targeting the Japanese and British "imperialism".

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42 Sun Bingyue, Shi Zhongjian, and Yang Shoulian (eds.), Qingdao zhi--Shetuan zhi, p. 3; Mingguo ribao, June 3, 1925.

which, in turn, served as what Timothy Brook has identified as a "moment of crisis" or for my purpose in this study, a movement for further labor mobilization and action. Indeed, nationalism, as one of the most important forces in modern China, affected the Chinese labor movement in one way or another and therefore deserves a separate chapter for discussion.
Chapter 2 Worker Nationalism at Work

Nationalism in modern China was real rather than a fabrication by partisan propagandists. Politicians could exploit nationalism to their own advantage, but they could not create it. Nationalism arose when China came into contact with Western nations or powers. It derived from the consciousness of the difference between "us (Chinese)" and "them (foreigners). It was an emotional attachment to China or Chinese as an entity or collectivity distinct from other nations or peoples. Chinese nationalism was particularly strong whenever China or the Chinese were weak and being humiliated by foreign powers.

Workers in coastal cities were among the first Chinese to have regular contact with foreigners and cultivate nationalistic feelings. They regarded foreign business owners not just as employers but also as aliens and their relations with each other as one between labor and capital and one

In using the term worker nationalism, I draw inspiration from Johnson's study. He examines well how the Japanese invasion and atrocities helped mobilize peasants in North China and gave rise to "peasant nationalism". See Chalmers A. Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). I assume that it may be useful to distinguish between different patterns of Chinese nationalism in terms of the ways it manifested itself among different segments of population. Now that there was "peasant nationalism", the use of "worker nationalism" should also be justifiable.

I am not arguing that workers had a clearly-defined and unified working-class consciousness. As some studies suggest,
between Chinese and foreigners as well. When feeling maltreated by foreign employers, workers tended to link this to the "foreignness" of their employers and therefore attempted to find solace in identifying themselves with their fellow compatriots. 46 Such consciousness could be reinforced by direct foreign violent activities in China and evolve into a strong national feeling, namely, nationalism.

Worker nationalism was utilitarian and pragmatic rather than ideological. When they expressed nationalistic feelings, Chinese workers kept their concrete and individual interests (wages and working conditions for example) in mind. In other words, workers and their organizations, trade unions, could exploit nationalism in promoting their economic interests and in enlisting support and sympathy from the public and state Chines

Chinese workers were deeply fragmented along lines of native place, occupation and role in production processes. See Emily Honig, Sisters and Strangers; Gail Hershatter, The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949; Elizabeth J. Perry, Shanghai on Strike. However, workers could not miss the fact that they as hired laborers were different from their employers as factory owners (or capitalists) and that they had some common concerns as regards their relations with the latter.

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Honig suggests that women workers from Northern Jiangsu preferred to work at the Japanese cotton mills in Shanghai rather than at Chinese ones, in order to avoid the Chinese employers' "condescending" attitude. See Emily Honig, Sisters and Strangers. In taking with some old women who once worked in Japanese cotton mills in Qingdao, I find a similar preference from them. However, it was equally evident that serious labour-capital tensions and conflicts did exist in these Japanese mills. Numerous labour dispute cases and strikes as shown in the first chapter of this study.
authorities in confrontation with foreign employers. They
could also use nationalism in checking state power and
particularly in frustrating state interference in union
activities. Moveover, nationalism served Chinese workers as an
instrument to secure or sustain personal pride and dignity.
Being aware that their own honor and disgrace were closely
linked to those of the Chinese as a collectivity, workers
could become consciously involved in nationalist movements.
This does not mean that nationalism was appealing to all
Chinese workers. Instead, some workers (worker turned foremen
and scab unionists, for example) might find it more profitable
to make alliance with foreign employers in dealing with their
fellow workers and even risk being classified as "Chinese
traitors". Despite this, nationalism was a strong force with
political implications among most Chinese workers in modern
times including the warlord period.

Indeed, worker nationalism was at work, implicitly or
explicitly, during the warlord rule. More often than not,
labor movements involving foreign businesses, apart from being
manifestations of labor-capital confrontation, also emitted
some nationalistic flavor and even erupted into vigorous
nationalist movements. On this point, the widespread
nationalistic outcry in the wake of Qingdao-Shanghai Massacres
proved quite illustrative and therefore constitutes the focus
of this chapter. It may be useful, however, first to look
briefly at the working of worker nationalism in the work
strikes at Qingdao’s Japanese cotton mills prior to "Qingdao-
Shanghai Massacres".

During the first joint cotton mill worker strike (April
1925), the trade union in Dakang cotton mill issued two
"letters of grievances" that clearly displayed workers’
nationalistic consciousness and their intention to appeal to
nationalism in their confrontation with Japanese employers.
The letters unequivocally identified the labor-capital
disputes in Japanese factories as conflicts between "Chinese"
and "Japanese":

"Qingdao is a place of our China and we are Chinese.
Whether allowing formation of trade unions or not is a matter
within the jurisdiction of Chinese local officials. How could
the Japanese have the right to search Chinese places and
detain Chinese citizens! The Japanese are bullying our country
and violating our sovereignty". 47

"In a weak China, we are forced to work in foreigners’
factories just for survival, which we regard as a humiliation
to our country. Recently, we workers at Dakang Cotton Mill in
Qingdao have prepared to organize a trade union for keeping
friendly contacts with each other and learning knowledge as
well as for increasing wages so that we would not die of
starvation. Unexpectedly, the Japanese interfered... and
intended to destroy our freedom. This is an insult to all our
compatriots, a scorn for our country’s dignity and a violation
of China’s judicial system. Compatriots, our poverty and
suffering are known to everyone. Whether we can hold out any
longer depends on support from other circles. We look forward

47
"Qingdao dakang shachang quanti gongren qigao shu" (A public
letter of sobbing grievances from all Dakang Cotton Mill
workers) (April 12, 1925), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2,
pp, 212-213 (originally in Xiangdao, no. 112, April 26, 1925).
to immediate help from the outside world." 48

In these letters, union leaders were apparently exploiting Chinese nationalism in counteracting Japanese employers' efforts to dissolve trade unions. The nationalistic appeal turned out to be helpful in overcoming divisions between workers and securing labor solidarity and public support. Not only common workers but also foremen from other cotton mills showed their support for strikers at Dakang by holding "sympathetic" or "joint" strikes. It would become a pattern in Qingdao's labor movement that whenever a worker strike occurred in one Japanese factory, it created profound repercussions in other Japanese factories and led to joint strikes of Chinese workers. Doubtless, among the forces underlying such unified action was worker nationalism.

To further illustrate this point, I would refer to the response of the foremen at the Japanese-owned Zhongyuan cotton mill to worker strikes. When the strike broke out at the Dakang cotton mill, Japanese owners and management of the Zhongyuan cotton mill, in order to prevent a similar strike from occurring in their own factory, speeded up their efforts to draw foremen over to their side. They promised lavish

favors to the foremen and even invited them to a banquet. Being suspicious and resentful of foremen’s intimate contacts with Japanese employers, workers made a statement in a newspaper, denouncing the foremen for their alleged collaboration with Japanese owners. As a matter of fact, most foremen were sympathetic with workers and were ready to join their strike. To clear themselves of the stigma of "Chinese traitors" (hanjian), sixty-four foremen in the Zhongyuan cotton mill also published a statement in the same newspaper, expressing their determination to stand on the side of their "Chinese compatriots" in confrontation with "the Japanese".

"Dear brothers, we are all citizens of the Republic of China and fellow compatriots. As for the division between workers and foremen, it is no more than a Japanese trickery. We ourselves do not have such a distinction in our minds.

"We and you are as close as lips and teeth. 'If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold'. When you suffer oppression and humiliation, how could we be excused from them? Watching you suffer every day, we are filled with indignation and anxiety. As soon as our plan is ready, let's go on strike together. We should be careful not to go in opposite directions. Otherwise, the Japanese would hold us up to ridicule.

"Compatriots, do not think that we (foremen) have been bought over by the Japanese. No matter how much they spend, we do not want to go with them. If we really betrayed you, our fellow workers, in favor of Japanese, we would be not only slaves of foreign power and traitors, but also cold-blooded beasts... For China’s glory, let us unite and fight against the Japanese." 49

49 "Zhongyuan gongtou zhonggao gongyou shu" (A public letter to fellow workers from foremen in the Zhongyuan Cotton Mill), in Qingdao gongmin bao, May 3, 1925.
The nationalistic tone was here self-evident. Of course, the foremen's embrace of nationalism and their identification of themselves with other workers were not without economic basis. There was no big gap between most foremen and workers in terms of their economic conditions, particularly incomes. More than workers, foremen had to face directly some condescending and even overbearing attitudes of Japanese managerial personnel and owners. Therefore, foremen also had their own grievances and harbored discontent and resentment of their Japanese bosses. Like workers, they attempted to find chances to improve their fortunes and therefore could easily feel Chinese workers' nationalism appealing.

Furthermore, worker nationalism constituted a check on state power in the state's relations with workers and trade unions. As discussed above, the Chinese local authorities at Qingdao showed, at least initially, considerable restraint and inactivity in dealing with worker strikes. Even though this should be largely accounted for by the ineptitude of state power resulting from factional struggles, it could also be understood in terms of the functioning of Chinese nationalism. Local officials were not immune to the fear that their

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50 That workers' nationalistic appeal worked well was also testified by the strikes in Shanghai's Japanese cotton mills in February 1925. The Chinese policemen, who were sent to suppress strikes, found themselves in a quandary and soon retreated without hurting workers when the latter cried to them, "Chinese should not oppress Chinese". Partly for the
legitimacy for power would have diminished had they collaborated with foreigners in suppressing Chinese workers. It may also be justifiable to say that it was because of its internal fragmentation and weakness that the state needed nationalism to win workers' support and to sustain its legitimacy. Unsavoury apppellations such as "Chinese traitors" and "running dogs of foreigners" (or specifically the Japanese) would be extremely damaging to the Chinese state's authority and to the careers of any Chinese officials. Nevertheless, Chinese officials' readiness to exploit worker nationalism did not warrant that they could always tolerate any labor movements with anti-foreign implications. Instead, there were limits on their tolerance and patience; there was also no lack of Chinese officials who would rather set aside workers' nationalistic appeals and turn to crack down on the labor movement in order to seek foreign support. Therefore, the occurrence of incidents like the "Qingdao Massacre" is not surprising. What is more noteworthy is that such incidents stirred up, without exception, widespread nationalist movements, which, in turn, led to further worker mobilization.

same reason, some leading figures of the Green and Red Gangs expressed their support for the strikes "against the Japanese beating (Chinese) people". Many trade union leaders in Shanghai were proteges of gang chieftains such as Du Yuesheng. See Deng Zhongxia, Zhongguo zhigong yundong jianshi (A brief history of China's labor movement) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957), pp. 136-138; Elizabeth Perry, Shanghai on Strike, chapter 5.
Immediately following "Qingdao-Shanghai Massacres", Qingdao, like other major Chinese cities, was drawn into the whirlpool of popular protests against the imperialists' atrocities. A large number of people from "various circles" (gejie) actively involved themselves in rallies, demonstrations, public speeches, circulating telegrams, collection of relief funds for victims and boycott of Japanese and British goods. In these activities, some existing social organizations, including student federations, trade unions, and business associations, found a new moment to revitalize themselves and to achieve solidarity. On the other hand, there emerged various new types of social organizations such as "support committees on Qingdao-Shanghai affairs", the "Association of All Circles in Qingdao for Advancing Foreign Affairs", the "Federation of All Circles in Qingdao" consisting of 42 organizations. In June 1925, various kinds of "support committees" made their appearance in about 100 different work units, industries or institutions. Even the Qingdao Police Agency jumped on the bandwagon and formed a "support committee". The largest and most influential organization of this kind was the one that was jointly founded by student federations, trade unions and the Chamber of Commerce on June 9, 1925, with more than 4,000 members. The Committee declared the following as its strategies or goals: (1) to support Shanghai people in striving to get the
"culprits" punished; (2) to sever economic relations with Japan and Britain and boycott their products; (3) to arouse Chinese citizens and convene the national assembly; and (4) to recover concessions. 51

It turned out that the joint action or alliance among different social organizations was only temporary. The major difficulty in sustaining unity lay in the fact that these social organizations differed in their concrete interests, which made their alliance susceptible to any carefully calculated sabotage from politicians. When the above-mentioned Federation of All Circles in Qingdao began to function to the detriment of the economic interests of Japanese and British and hence caused their protest, it aroused vigilance and fear of the Qingdao authorities. The latter decided to bring the Federation under its control. In face of the surging popular anti-imperialist movement, the authorities felt it more expedient to resort to some roundabout and nonviolent ways than flagrant and high-handed means. On the one hand, they attempted to split up the Federation by bribing some of its members. On the other, some politicians including the police chief managed to squeeze into the Federation as its formal members under the pretext that they had the legitimate right to do so inasmuch as the Federation was known as one of "all circles". Once inside the Federation, these politicians took

51 Shenbao, June 13, 1925.
pains to sow discord between its members and obstruct its proposals or resolutions that they deemed too offending to foreigners and threatening to their own power position and interests. Such a technique from politicians worked well in undermining the Federation's unity and made any concerted action of its members difficult or impossible. Finally, the Federation of All Circles in Qingdao ceased to function and disintegrated. Its original members, various social organizations such as student associations and trade unions, turned to pursue their own ways. Occasionally, students and workers made alliances.

Students proved the most dynamic force in this nationalist movement. Beside organizing many large-scale demonstrations, performing anti-imperialist plays and editing anti-imperialist publications, they set up a special organ, the Group for Inspecting Enemies' Goods, with the responsibility of investigating Japanese and British goods and supervising boycott of them. In a sense, it was under the students' persistent pressure that the merchant elite in Qingdao agreed to enforce the boycott.  

As indicated above, Qingdao's Chamber of Commerce did

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52 Fu Shutang, "Dang lingdao xia de sifang jichang gongren de douzheng" (The CCP-led worker struggles in the Sifang Rolling Stock Plant), in Qingdao canan shiliao (Historical materials on the Qingdao massacre, pp. 367-374.

53 Pingmin ribao, June 18, 1925; Shenbao, June 19, 1925.
join in the protest movement. However, it had reservations in boycotting foreign goods, particularly Japanese goods, inasmuch as the city's merchants had maintained close business relations with their Japanese counterparts. Although Qingdao came under Chinese administration since 1922, its commerce was largely dominated by Japanese merchants. The goods that Chinese merchants dealt in were mostly Japanese. As far as the Chinese merchants were concerned, the boycott of Japanese goods would be tantamount to shutting down their own businesses. So the Chamber of Commerce refused to go ahead with the boycott of Japanese goods. Instead, it suggested that only British goods be boycotted. The students felt that the merchants' position was unacceptable, for it was Japanese who were behind the Qingdao Massacre and therefore deserved punishment along with the British who brought about the Shanghai Massacre. On June 17, 1925, when they learned that directors of the Chamber of Commerce were holding a secret meeting on how to resist other social organizations' demand for boycotting Japanese goods, the student federation immediately organized a demonstration, involving about 4,800 students, to protest the Chamber's "conspiracy". Despite police obstruction, students surrounded and rushed into the Chamber of Commerce, forcing the directors to sign pledges to
join and persevere in the boycott. 54

Student movements should be the subject of a separate study. The reason I discuss them here is that the nationalist campaigns with students as the leading societal force gave rise to a general milieu favorable to the mobilization of workers and the regrouping of trade unions. In the aftermath of the Qingdao Massacre, as suggested previously, trade unions in Japanese cotton mills and the once most influential Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union were closed down by the Qingdao authorities with the support of warlord Zhang Zongchang and under persistent Japanese pressure. Most trade unions in other industries also disintegrated in the terror brought on by the massacre. However, except for some major union leaders who were arrested (later most of them were released under public pressure 55), most union members or union activists remained in their factories. With the coming of the nationalist campaigns known as the May Thirtieth Movement, they found an opportunity to revive their union activities. Flexible and cautious this time, unions attached more importance to substance than forms

54 Li Zhongwei, "Wusa canan qianhou de Qingdao gongli zhiye xuexiao" (Qingdao's public vocational schools around the May Thirtieth Massacre), in Qingdao canan shiliao, pp. 374-382.

55 Shenbao, June 18, July 13, 1925; Yishi bao, July 3, July 6, July 13, July 16, 1925;
of their activities. For example, they assumed the seemingly innocuous name of support committee rather than the sensitive name of trade union, in order to circumvent the authorities' interference. Moreover, new trade unions came into existence in industries or sectors previously without unions, including cart transport, hairdressing, and even foreign consulates in Qingdao. In its inaugural meeting on June 23, 1925, the barber's trade union announced that its members would not serve Japanese or British on pains of fine or shutdown of business. 56 The Chinese who worked with Qingdao's foreign consulate and other organs claimed, in a letter to foreign consuls, that they formed the union simply as a matter of conscience in relation to the Shanghai Massacre and in order to collect donations for the strikers and that their union by no means connoted any anti-foreignism. They also appealed to foreign consuls to help settle the "Shanghai affairs" "early and fairly". 57 Meanwhile, trade unions in different industries began to realize the necessity of showing labor solidarity and specifically of forming a citywide labor organization. On July 6, 1925, upon the initiative of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union, the Qingdao Labor Federation was founded, involving several different trade unions. It mainly engaged in boycotting English and Japanese goods and collecting donations

56 Chenbao, June 30, 1925.

57 Qingdao gongmin bao, July 8, 1925.
to support cotton mill workers. 58

Partly encouraged by the above labor activities and partly irritated by some retaliating measures and maltreatment by Japanese employers, workers at Japanese cotton mills held another (the third) strike on July 23, 1925. The strike started in the Dakang cotton mill when Japanese managerial staff beat a Chinese worker into unconsciousness. It was soon jointed by workers from other two cotton mills, Naigai Wata Kaisha, and Longxiong. Workers raised ten demands including acknowledgement of trade unions' legitimacy, "compensation for the injured worker", and wage increases. 59 Having already felt the headache with the widespread nationalistic movement and especially the boycott of foreign products, Japanese business people could not afford more losses and therefore sought a quick solution to the strike. By the same token, their Chinese counterparts were also loathe to see the strike

58 Fu Shutang, "Dang lingdao xia de sifang jichang gongren de douzheng", in Qingdao canan shiliao, pp. 367-374.

Similar developments occurred in Shanghai during the May Thirtieth Movement. On May 31, 1925, representatives of different trade unions gathered and announced the formation of the Shanghai General Trade Union Trade unions, the first city-wide labor organization in Shanghai. By June 5, it enrolled 117 lower-level trade unions, with a membership of 217,804 (strike workers). It was dissolved by Shanghai's warlord authorities on September 8, 1925. However, trade unions continued to exist at enterprises. See Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 2, pp. 382, 486; Deng Zhongxia, Zhongguo zhigong yundong jianshi, p. 185.

59 Chenbao, July 30, 1925.
expand and last any longer, fearing that it would otherwise disrupt their own businesses. In this aspect, economic considerations apparently transcended national divisions. It happened that the pro-Japan Zhang Zongchang, the governor and concurrent military governor of Shandong province, arrived in Qingdao for inspection. He was warmly received by both Japanese and Chinese business people and government officials. The Japanese consul and some influential merchants appealed

There was a strikingly similar pattern with regard to the behavior of Chinese businessmen in Qingdao and Shanghai during the May Thirtieth Movement. In the beginning, Shanghai’s Chamber of Commerce, like its Qingdao counterpart, did show support for worker strikes and other popular anti-imperialist activities under the pressure of the outspoken nationalistic outcry and more importantly out of consideration of merchant elite’s interests. Specifically, it attempted to exploit worker nationalism in pressing foreigners (particularly the British) to make concessions on two issues. The first involved giving Chinese merchants an equal representation with foreigners in the Board of Directors of taxpayers’ council, a powerful legislative institution within the International Settlement. (So far the Board consisted of six British, two Japanese, and one American; although accounting for 70% of the total taxpayers in the Settlement, the Chinese had been denied representation). The second issue was about return of judicial power in the Settlement to Chinese and abolishment of the joint judicial system, which had been virtually dominated by foreigners and particularly unfavorable to Chinese merchants. Under the system, Chinese were often subjected to undue fines. Like their Qingdao counterparts, however, Shanghai’s businessmen had reservations about participating in nationalistic campaigns. From the very beginning, the Chamber of Commerce refused to join the Federation of Workers, Merchants and Students. The merchant elite felt that their interests were being threatened, with the movement proceeding and workers being increasingly mobilized and trade unions becoming more and more militant. Eventually, they turned to support the Shanghai authorities in closing down the Shanghai General Trade Union on September 8, 1925. See Deng Zhongxia, Zhongguo zhigong yundong jianshi, pp. 189, 195-198, 216.
Zhang to "mete out severe punishment" to workers and trade unions as well as some local newspapers under the excuse that the latter were "red", "radical", and "disturbing order". Meanwhile, they gave Zhang 300,000 yuan as bribe. Zhang responded immediately. What happened was again an armed crackdown on workers, the arrest of union leaders and newspaper editors, and above all, a close-down of trade unions and other social organizations such as various support committees. Therefore, the warlord regime in Qingdao imposed tight restrictions on popular movements. Trade union activities were forced to go underground and experienced a low ebb. However, the high-handed policy of the warlord regime did not last long. The regime was soon to face strong challenges from new political forces, particularly the Guomindang (GMD). The latter, at least in the years around the Northern Expedition, deemed workers as an ally and chose to sponsor labor movements. As a corollary, workers found a new chance to resume their open union activities.

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61 Minguo ribao, July 30, 1925; Chenbao, August 1, 1925; Shi Pu, "Qingdao canju zhi jingguo" (Process of the Qingdao massacre), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 2, pp. 185-189 (originally in Xiangdao, no. 126, August 1925).
Chapter 3  Trade Unions: an Ally of the Guomindang 1924-1927

1. The Guomindang’s Labor Policies

The primary purpose of this chapter is to suggest that the inability of the warlord state in effectively dealing with trade unions not only resulted from its own inherent divisions and restraints by worker nationalism, as discussed in the preceding chapters, but also was due to competition from other political forces such as the Guomindang (GMD). In contending for national power with warlords, the GMD turned to seek alliance with workers and promote labor movements and therefore contributed to the growth of trade unions. This chapter also aims at providing some information on the backdrop of trade unions under Chiang Kai-shek since 1927, which will be addressed in Part II.

The GMD formulated the strategy of allying with workers in the mid-1920s, when Sun Yat-sen reorganized the party with assistance from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Soviet Union and established the National Government at Guangzhou. At its first national conference in January 1924, the GMD formally announced that it would endeavour "to make labor laws aiming at improvement of workers’ living conditions, and to protect and assist labor organizations". It also appealed workers to join the GMD and the "national
revolution". In November of 1924, the southern National Government under Sun Yat-sen promulgated a trade union regulation, the first union legislation in Chinese history. The regulation recognized that trade unions were a legal person and were equal with employers' organizations in status; as workers' organizations, they had the right to sign collective contracts with employers on workers' behalf and hold joint meetings with employers to discuss issues on improving workers' conditions and to solve labor disputes; with the agreement of most of their members, trade unions had the right to declare strikes; and unions enjoyed freedom of speech. On the relations between trade unions and the National Government, the regulation did not say much. It only stipulated that trade unions register with local authorities and accept official arbitration in case of disputes between unions and employers. The union-GMD relationship was defined more clearly at the GMD's second national conference in January 1926. The conference stated that while the GMD as a "political" organization should exercise political leadership


63 Liu Mingkui (ed), Zhongguo gongren jieji lishi zhuangkuang (Historical situation of the Chinese working class) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1985), pp. 720-723.
over trade unions, the latter as "economic" organizations should maintain autonomy and their popular character as well. Organizationally, the GMD set up the Workers' Department in 1924 as a special organ in charge of trade union affairs, particularly guiding formation of trade unions. 64

The above policies of the GMD greatly facilitated the emergence and growth of trade unions especially in the territories under the GMD regime. This does not necessarily mean that the GMD personnel got directly involved in setting up trade unions, but the regime's liberal labor policies created a political atmosphere congenial to the rise of the labor movement and trade unions. Unlike their counterparts under warlord rule, workers in the GMD-controlled areas did not need to worry about being purged by political authorities for forming trade unions. Indeed, trade unions proliferated under the GMD. Between 1925 and 1926, there were more than 600 trade unions in Guangdong province. In the city of Guangzhou alone, their number reached about 210 by early 1926. 65

2. Workers and Trade Unions in the National Revolution

64 Shang Shiqing, Zhongguo guomindang yu zhongguo laogong yundong, p. 180.
65 Luo Chuanhua, Jinri zhongguo laogong wenti (Facing labor issues in China) (Shanghai: Qingnian xiehui shuju, 1933), pp. 42-43; Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 2, p. 521.
The GMD sponsorship of the labor movement and trade unions did not imply that it could dictate to them. Instead, its relationship with trade unions was more a partnership than one of domination and subordination. Workers and their organizations participated in many GMD-led campaigns such as the pacification of the Merchant Society (1924), the eastern expedition against Chen Jingming (1925) and the Northern Expedition (1926). They did this, however, largely out of consideration of their own interests. The Merchant Society in Canton had about 8,000 members and its head was Chen Bolian, a comprador affiliated with a British bank in Guangdong. Being resentful of the National Government for failing to provide merchants with sufficient protection, the Merchant Society, backed by Hong Kong authorities and warlord Chen Jingming, planned a coup to overthrow the GMD regime. It ordered a large amount of weapons from abroad, which arrived at Canton in August 1924 and were detained by government forces on Sun Yat-sen's order. As a protest, the Merchant Society declared a strike. Later, Sun agreed to return the weapons to the merchants under the condition that they provide financial support to the National Government. After getting back weapons, members of the Merchant Society became militant and came into conflict with the "worker-peasant army" organized by trade unions. They killed about ten people in random shooting. Sun ordered military pacification of the merchant "rebellion".
Regular Government troops advanced to the urban center of Canton in five routes and launched a frontal attack. Meanwhile, the "worker-peasant army" took concerted action, shooting the merchants from behind and destroying barriers set up by the latter. Eventually, the merchant Society were forced to surrender. 66

Why did the "worker-peasant army" support the National Government under Sun Yat-sen in putting down the "rebellion of Merchant Society"? The "worker-peasant army" largely consisted of members of trade unions, particularly members of the Guangdong General Trade Union of Machinery Industry and the Tea Industry Union. As laborers, they considered merchants (capitalists) as their natural adversaries. They feared that their interests would have been threatened had the merchant elite strengthened themselves by obtaining large quantities of weapons. To check the growth of merchants' power, trade unions found a ready ally in the National Government, which was also facing the merchants' direct challenge and was concerned to consolidate its power by making alliance with workers. Besides, trade unions in Guangdong could not miss the fact that they had prospered under the GMD's generous labor policies and that there were no alternatives to the National Government under Sun Yat-sen. They would lose what they had if the latter were replaced by some different regime such as

66 Ma Chaojun, Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, pp. 319-320.
warlords. Therefore, trade unions were mainly motivated by concern for their own interests rather than by partisan rhetoric in participating in the pacification against the Merchant Society. If the revolutionary propaganda made sense to workers, it was because it accorded with workers' interests.

On the other hand, workers were ready to press the GMD regime for improvement of their economic conditions. One example was the Yue-Han railway worker strike in 1925. Workers went on strike for improvement of their economic conditions: wage increase, eight-hour work day and medical subsidies. The strike ended through the mediation of the GMD Central Party Department, with acceptance of these requests by GMD railway authorities. What seems striking was that the railway was under the National Government's control and 70% of railway workers were GMD members. We can only assume that workers joined the Party for their economic advancement and the party was willing to make concessions to workers in order to maintain their support. 67 Similar concern also compelled them to support the eastern expedition in 1925 and Northern Expedition in 1926. Such campaigns, in turn, served as a stimulus to the expansion of labor movement and trade unions.

The Northern Expedition aimed at eliminating the Beiyang warlords and enjoyed widespread support from workers, who

67Ma Chaojun, ibid., vol. 2, pp. 351-352.
regarded the warlords as their enemies. In Hubei, for example, workers assisted the expedition in various ways such as destroying warlord Wu Peifu’s transport lines and repairing roads for northern expeditionary forces. For this, of course, workers got their "reward"—they found an excellent moment to resurrect union activities. Since the February Seventh Massacre of 1923, all trade unions in Hubei Province, except a few with official connections, were closed down or forced to go underground by warlords. When the Northern Expeditionary Forces occupied Wuhan on September 6, 1926, those underground trade unions surfaced and many new unions emerged. One week later, the Wuhan Workers’ Congress was publicly formed, with 400 worker deputies representing more than 100 trade unions. In mid-October, the Congress was renamed the Hubei General Trade Union. By the end of 1926, its membership increased to 300,000. Such rapid development of trade unions was partly due to the efforts of Communists. Taking advantage of the national revolution and especially the GMD’s policy of alliance with the CCP, the latter tried to expand its own power by taking part in the labor movement and allying with workers. Communists filled the leadership of the Hubei General Trade Union. However, they were far from able to control

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68 Zhang Guotao, Wo de huiyi (My recollections) (Hong Kong: Mingbao juekan chubanshe, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 555-558; Ma Chaojun, Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 2, pp. 577-578.
numerous local or grassroots trade unions and to dictate their agendas. Like Guomindang-sponsored unions, the Communist-controlled Hubei General Trade Union also had to come to terms with workers' demands relating to major economic issues such as minimum wage rates and shorter working hours. In this sense, the relationship between the CCP and workers could also be identified as a partnership. Just as the former attempted to use workers in dealing with its political rivals (warlords and potentially the GMD), workers intended to rely on the CCP, besides the GMD, in confronting the warlord state power and more importantly their employers.

In Shanghai, workers also responded enthusiastically to the Northern Expedition. With the expeditionary forces approaching Shanghai, the Shanghai General Trade Union (under the CCP), which had been purged by warlord Sun Chuanfang, seized the chance and accelerated activities of mobilizing workers and set up armed worker pickets with 2,000 members. In collaboration with some GMD labor activists, the General Trade Union organized three large-scale worker strikes or uprisings from October 1926 to March 1927. With the success of the third uprising, the Shanghai General Trade Union initiated the Shanghai Congress, proclaiming formation of a Shanghai

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The Northern Expedition also had effects on the labor movement in Shandong Province. Before the Expedition, Guomindang’s influence in Shandong was only minimal. Even though GMD party branches existed in various cities and county seats and committed themselves to the policy of cooperation with the CCP, they, like their communist counterparts, played little role in mobilizing workers, specifically in worker strikes. This was primarily due to the restraints imposed by warlord regimes, especially by Zhang Zongchang. After suppressing Qingdao’s third cotton mill strike (July 23-26, 1925), Zhang outlawed all popular movements and took pains to destroy Communist and GMD organizations in the province.

As the GMD-led national revolution thrust northwards, both the GMD and Communists rapidly restored their organizations and became active in instigating popular protests against warlord Zhang Zongchang. With their assistance, the labor movement began to revive and gain momentum in the first half of 1926. In Jinan, trade unions

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were reestablished in major factories such as the Tianjin-Pukou Railway Rolling Stock Plant and the Lufeng Cotton Mill. Among workers of the Jinan Railway Station and other factories there emerged union-type organizations including worker clubs, the Happiness-Sharing Class (tongle ban), Hardship Relief Society (jinan hui) and Recreation Group (youyi tuan). In Qingdao, the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway General Trade Union, which was once powerful but closed down in the aftermath of the third cotton mill worker strike, also staged a comeback. At the same time, however, workers in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills seemed relatively quiet. Trade unions in these mills had suffered such heavy losses during the crackdown (July 1925) that they needed more time to revive. Moreover, Japan kept pressing Zhang Zongchang to protect Japanese interests in Shandong particularly against the labor movement. Zhang had to come to terms with the Japanese in order to get their support in dealing with the imminent threat from his main adversary, the Northern Expeditionary Forces. In addition, Japan was ready to resort to military intervention if feeling its interests threatened. In fact, it did this twice (May 4--September 5, 1927; April 25--March 28, 1929), on the latter

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Jia Weichang and Tang Zhiyong (eds), Shandong Tongshi--Xiandai juan, p. 71.
occasion causing a large-scale massacre of Chinese. In Qingdao, many Japanese troops were deployed around Japanese factories and residential quarters. Some were even stationed within Japanese cotton mills to supervise workers. While the Japanese military intervention could check resurgence of trade unions in Japanese enterprises for the time being, it further aroused or strengthened Chinese workers' nationalism and therefore sowed the seeds of troubles for them in the years to come.

73 In May 1927, when the Nationalist forces defeated Zhang Zongchang in Northern Jiangsu and advanced to Shandong, Japan sent troops to Qingdao under the pretext of protecting Japanese residents. Four months later, Japanese troops retreated when Chiang Kai-shek, trapped by internal power struggles, temporarily suspended the Northern Expedition. After the Expedition resumed and drove Zhang Zongchang out of Shandong in April 1928, Japan again resorted to military intervention. Japanese marines and follow-up units landed in Qingdao on April 20, and moved westward along the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway, and finally entered Jinan, where they provoked a clash with Nationalist expeditionary forces. The latter soon withdrew from the city on Chiang Kai-shek's order to avoid formal military confrontation with the Japanese. However, Japanese troops continued to attack not only Chinese troops but also civilian residents, leading to the so-called Jinan Massacre on May 3, 1928, in which about 1,000 Chinese were killed. See Qingdao Archives (ed) (not formally published), Qingdao dashi ji shiliao (Historical materials on Qingdao's chronicle of events), pp. 67-69; Jia Weichang and Tang Zhiyong (eds), Shandong Tongshi--Xiandai juan, p. 79-83.
Conclusion of Part I

Chinese trade unions in the warlord period were a vital societal force. To a large extent, they succeeded in maintaining a certain degree of autonomy and popular character. Such a success should be, first and foremost, attributed to workers' instinct and tenacity to preserve their own organizations and to safeguard their economic interests. It also depended on the general political atmosphere, which was characterized by competition between the warlord state and other political forces and by prevalent factional struggles within the state itself. In this competitive situation, workers and their trade unions were wooed by all parties or factions as an ally and could easily get a space or room to manoeuvre. In addition, considering the presence of large numbers of foreign capitalists in China, trade unions had another lever, worker nationalism, to expand their influence and repulse the intrusion of state power. With such resources at their disposal, workers and trade unions in the warlord period were able to remain outside the state. By the same token, they were unusually militant and uncompromising, which incurred intermittent repression by the state. Of course, it was the state's policies and conservative nature that should be the first to blame.

The warlord state was characterized by instability and volatility. This partly explained its lack of commitment to
make formal labor legislation and to set up special institutions concerning labor issues. Without such channels, the warlord state had to use naked violence to deal with labor movement. Ultimately, however, its readiness to do this was rooted in the nature of state. Any state was, by nature, conservative in terms of its attitude towards organized labor movement. It had to maintain balance of different interests within the territories under its control and could not afford to allow unchecked growth of one certain social group such as trade unions to threaten others' (capitalists' for example) and particularly the state's own power.

The Guomindang regime was relatively weak for most of the warlord period. Being weak and covetous of state power, it needed more popular support and therefore became actively involved in mobilizing workers and supporting trade unions. Nevertheless, the regime's enthusiasm did not last long. Instead, it subsided dramatically as soon as the GMD overrode its warlord rivals and gained national (state) power. The point was that the GMD no longer needed workers or trade unions as an active revolutionary ally and that the regime as a state power-holder became conservative. It is usually said that Chiang Kai-shek betrayed Sun Yat-sen by, among other things, abandoning his radical labor policies. I wonder whether Sun himself would have sustained such policies had he survived the warlord rules. When I say that GMD since 1927
became conservative, I do not mean that the labor movement or the trade union was doomed to marginalization under the GMD rule. Workers and their organizations still had cards to play and space to exist and to develop.
Part II  Trade Unions under the Nationalist Regime

The Nationalist (Guomindang) regime ascended to national state power in 1927, riding the tide of the labor movement and with widespread support of workers. Once in power, however, it began to reshape its labor policies. Preoccupied with state-rebuilding and particularly consolidation and expansion of its own power, the new regime under Chiang Kai-shek deemed any radical labor movement more as a disturbing force than a constructive one. What the regime felt most threatening was that such a labor movement would be exploited by Communists against the GMD government. Therefore, the GMD regime took it as the priority of its labor policy to eradicate communist influence and to modify the radical nature of the labor movement by reorganizing trade unions and incorporating them into the state structure. In addition, it laid overwhelming stress on cooperation between labor and capital and deliberately played down their conflicts, while posing itself as a representative of the interests of both laborers and capitalists and as their arbitrator or mediator.

As a first step, the Nationalist regime dissolved existing communist-led trade unions and established official institutions, in their place, for labor affairs. In Shanghai, after closing down the Shanghai General Trade Union, the city’s military authorities (Songhu Garrison Headquarters) set up the Unification Committee for Shanghai Union Organization.
(Shanghai gonghui zuzhi tongyi weiyuanhui) on April 16, 1927 and charged it with registering and examining trade unions and mediating disputes among them. In November of 1927, the Nationalist Shanghai Party Branch formed a similar institution, the Shanghai Workers’ General Association, as a rival of the military-controlled Unification Committee. The competition between the two organizations contradicted the GMD’s original intention to maintain unified control over the labor movement and therefore led to their dismissal and replacement by a new institution in May 1928, the Reorganization Committee for Shanghai Unions (Shanghai gonghui zhengli weiyuanhui). The committee, composed of seven members from party, government and military, was made directly responsible to the City Party Branch and empowered to register and reorganize all trade unions and direct their activities. Trade unions that did not register with the party-controlled Reorganization Committee had to be disbanded. On the order of the GMD central government, various reorganization committees were also set up in other provinces and cities including Qingdao. The establishment of the reorganization committees was part of the GMD regime’s effort to centralize power in the Party by neutralizing social organizations. As early as February 1928, the GMD Central Committee decided to dissolve

the Departments of Workers, Peasants, Merchants, Women, and Youth, which had been formed on the Soviet model and had taken charge of mobilizing different social strata under Sun Yat-sen. All affairs concerning popular movements and organizations were transferred to a new institution, the People's Training Committee, affiliated with Nationalist party authorities. A regulation passed by the GMD Central Committee in June 1928 further stipulated that reorganization committees be set up at various levels and supervise all popular associations involving peasants, merchants, youths and women. Thus, not only trade unions but also other associations were required to accept direct Nationalist party-state supervision.

At the same time, in order to legitimize its control over trade unions, the Nanjing Nationalist government promulgated a trade union law in October 1929 and enforced it in major Chinese cities including Shanghai and Qingdao. The law stipulated that only with the official sanction could trade unions be organized; all trade unions should register with local authorities; and within the same industry in a certain area, there should be only one trade union. The law also

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75 Luo Chuanhua, Jinri zhongguo laogong wenti, pp. 62, 114; "Geji minzhong tuanti zhengli weiyuanhui zuzhi tiaoli" (The organizational regulation on reorganization committees for various people's associations), in Ma Lu and Li Yin (eds), Qingdao dangshi ziliao (1986), vol. 3. pp. 354-356.
empowered local authorities to disband trade unions if the latter were found "breaking laws" or "disturbing order and peace". It defined the goal of trade unions as "promoting production", "increasing workers' knowledge and technical ability", and "improving workers' working and living conditions". One of their major functions was to mediate labour-capital disputes and conflicts among trade union members. In addition, the law acknowledged trade unions' status as a legal person and forbade employers from dismissing workers for joining trade unions. 76 Taken as a whole, the Trade Union Law, while recognizing some rights of workers, primarily served the Nationalist regime as a means to control trade unions and to do so without banning the unions openly: control behind the appearance of support.

On the surface, the Nationalist regime, through the above measures, seemed to have established its authority over trade unions. In reality, however, the regime had never been able to penetrate or neutralize all the trade unions, especially at the local level. The point was that like its warlord predecessor, the new regime succumbed to severe fragmentation and divisions and that nationalism was still there and worked in favor of social organizations such as trade unions by checking the regime's efforts to control them. Moreover, the

Nationalist local authorities faced enormous challenges from their various competitors such as the CCP in controlling trade unions. Their power was so limited that they could not even dictate to some trade unions allegedly under their own leadership, the so-called "yellow" unions.

In this part, I will first briefly examine some major "yellow" trade unions, especially their relations with the Nationalist state (Chapter 4) and then focus on Qingdao's trade union activities in Japanese cotton mills and on how they were affected by the internal divisions of GMD local authorities (Chapter 5).
Chapter 4  Agitation of "Yellow Trade Unions", the Case of Shanghai

Yellow trade unions emerged in Chinese cities as a result of implementation of the above GMD policies and became the dominant form of trade unions under Nationalist rule. The term of "yellow trade unions" was used to refer to those unions that formally registered with the Nationalist authorities and to distinguish them from "red" trade unions under communist influence. In theory, as officially-sanctioned labor organizations, yellow unions were supposed to accept GMD leadership and serve the regime by promoting "labor-capital cooperation". In reality, however, GMD influence on trade unions was minimal. This was partly reflected by the weak presence of the Party within grassroots-level trade unions. According to an investigation report by GMD Central Committee's Popular Movement Direction Commission, GMD members existed only in 34 out of 97 trade unions in Shanghai in 1933. Among the 354 Party members, 100 were concentrated in the Postal Union, accounting for only a small proportion of all union members (3,520), whereas the other 254 were scattered in the other 35 trade unions. 77 As regards their activities, yellow unions especially at the grassroots (enterprise) level

77 Ming K. Chan, "Guomin zhengfu Nanjing shiqi zhi laogong zhengce" (Labor policies under the Nanjing Nationalist Regime) in Ming K. Chan et al., (eds.), Zhongguo yu xianggang gongyun zongzheng, pp. 92-107.
were quite concerned with gaining autonomy from Nationalist
state power and took as a priority to express and safeguard
workers' economic interests. In doing so, they often found
themselves in conflict not only with capitalists but also with
the GMD authorities.

As early as 1928 when learning that the Nationalist
regime was prepared to suspend the labor movement, Shanghai's
"seven big trade unions"\(^78\) including the well-known Postal
Union publicly appealed to the Nationalist central government
to continue the labor movement and to "guarantee labor
organizations and promote their growth". They accused the
official-installed Unification Committee as an organ filled
with "corrupt elements" and "unqualified to lead workers".
Later in that year, the "seven big trade unions" submitted a
similar proposal to the GMD central authorities, urging it "to
absolutely stop destruction of labor organizations" and
guarantee workers' minimum wage rates as well as eight-hour
workday.\(^79\) In 1931, representatives from about seventy trade
unions gathered at the Postal Union's headquarters and decided
to form an independent general trade union. In addition, they

\(^78\) They were the printing and publishing unions of the Commercial
Press, the newspaper union, the postal union, the British
American Tobacco Company and Nanyang Brothers Tobacco unions,
and the Chinese Electric union. Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on
Strike*, p. 95.

\(^79\) Ma Chaojun, *Zhongguo laogong yundong shi*, vol. 3, pp. 784,
789-791; 826-827.
passed proposals concerning state-union relations and workers' rights. Specifically, they demanded that the Nationalist Party follow democratic principles, combine itself with the people and avoid "following the old disastrous road to dictatorship"; that the existing trade union law and all other labor legislation be rescinded and a new trade union law be made on the basis of the Trade Union Regulation of 1925 and with the participation of worker representatives; that the new union law should provide clear guarantees for all kinds of labor organizations; and that all trade unions and the kind of labor movements existing before 1929 should be restored. Such proposals and demands represented a protest against the regime's efforts to neutralize trade unions. It also implied that Nationalist state power was far from dominating labor organizations despite its various tactics.

Although often complaining about state intervention, yellow trade unions largely regarded the Nationalist regime as an arbitrator or mediator and an ally in their confrontation with capitalist employers. Indeed, it was the employers that yellow unions saw as their real adversaries and it was with them that yellow trade unions were in constant conflicts. In such conflicts, yellow unions often displayed their

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characteristics as workers' organizations. On this point, I would refer the Shanghai Postal Union, the British American Tobacco Company union, and the French Tramway Company union--three major "yellow" unions.

The Postal Union was formed in August of 1925 in the wake of the May Thirtieth Movement, as a direct result of the strike of the postal workers, which was in turn partly instigated by Communists. The union was reorganized under GMD aegis in 1927, with GMD members Qian Lisheng and Huang Xiaocun as its main leaders. Later, they were succeeded by Lu Jingshi and Shen Tiansheng. Lu worked as a middle-level postal clerk and, as a GMD member, kept some close relationship with Chiang Kai-shek. Once an ordinary postal worker, Shen Tiansheng took the main leadership of the Postal Union in a reelection. He insisted that trade unions should not concern themselves with politics; that neither the GMD nor the CCP should interfere with trade union affairs; and that unions should simply work for the welfare of workers in order to win their support. The first thing Shen did, on the workers' request and in the trade union's name, was to press the postal authorities to pay workers year-end bonuses. With the success in doing this, the Postal Union's prestige greatly increased

81 "Shanghai youwu gonghui de jianli" (The establishment of the Shanghai postal union), in "Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shiliao" (Historical materials on the postal workers' movement in Shanghai) (1922-1937) (Shanghai, 1986), vol. pp. 15-21.
among workers. In October 1928, the union organized a strike involving 2,500 workers in twenty post offices. It raised sixteen demands, including a revision of wage system in favor of workers, no dismissal of workers without the union's consent, no wage deduction in case of long-term sick leave, and guarantee for union leaders' personal safety. The union also accused Liu Shufan, general director of Shanghai's postal service, of collaborating with foreigners in "oppressing" workers and demanded his dismissal. 82 The postal authorities' immediate response was to call in the police force under the pretext of maintaining order and to report about the strike to the GMD Nanjing government. The latter, in turn, ordered Shanghai's GMD Party Branch to mediate. Representatives from the Party Branch urged the Post Union to resume work before negotiating on the union's demands on the grounds that interruption of postal services would affect adversely all walks of life. They praised strikers for their "good order" and admitted that the strike was by no means an anti-government action. Instead, it reminded the government of workers' economic problems and of the abuses in the administration of postal service. On its part, the Postal Union was not prepared to directly challenge the Party Branch

82 The postal service was within the jurisdiction of the Nanjing government's Ministry of Transport and Communication. However, some top administrative positions of Shanghai's postal agency were assumed by the British.
and decided to end the strike. Late in October 1928, the Nanjing GMD government indeed fulfilled some demands by the Postal Union.  

The GMD authorities were moderate in handling the postal workers' strike and in dealing with the Post Union, especially considering that postal service was a state enterprise. The City Party Branch conducted itself more as a neutral mediator slightly in favor of the Post Union than as an overbearing master of it. Such mildness in turn suggested that the Postal Union and workers were quite a force relatively independent of the state authorities and that the latter could not afford to offend and alienate them. Particularly, the GMD regime feared that alienated unions or workers would become supporters of Communists, who always posed as champions of workers' interests. The regime regarded Communists as its primary rival in controlling trade unions and labor movement. As Ma Chaojun, a senior Nationalist official in charge of labor affairs, suggested, the purpose of reorganizing trade unions since 1927 was to exclude Communists from them and to prevent the Communist Party from utilizing workers. Some GMD leaders

83 Shen Tiansheng, "Huiyi yijiu erqi dao saner nian de Shanghai youwu gonghui), in Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shiliao (Historical materials on the postal workers' movement in Shanghai) (1922-1937), vol, pp. 77-92; Ma Chaojun, Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, pp. 836-840.

84 Ma Chaojun, Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 4, pp. 1560.
realized that they could not succeed in this attempt without offering workers what the Communists promised to workers. Partly due to such awareness, the GMD local authorities showed considerable tolerance towards yellow unions.

If the GMD authorities mainly performed the role of a mediator in handling labor-capital disputes in Chinese enterprises, it behaved more like an ally of trade unions in dealing with those within foreign enterprises. The point was that Nationalist officials especially at the local (city) level were not immune to the influence of worker nationalism, which was often used by trade unions to win wide support in their confronting foreign employers. More importantly, the Nationalist state was ready to rely on trade unions to curb the influence of some "recalcitrant" foreign capitalists, whom the state often found ignore its authority.

One source of the GMD regime's dissatisfaction with some foreign business people was their refusal to honor the business tax rates set by the regime. As early as 1927, the Nationalist Finance Ministry attempted to enforce a unitary tax rate of 50% on tobacco product. The British American Tobacco Company (BAT) felt the rate too high and insisted that it only pay 27.5%. After being rejected, BAT, under the pretext of shortage of coal and its inability to pay the heavy

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85 The communist strategy of labor movement will be discussed in chapter 5.
taxes, declared a two-month lockout in July 1927, which immediately resulted in the unemployment of 8,000 Chinese workers. The Company intended to use the lockout to press the Nationalist regime for concessions on the tax issue. It was the workers, however, who were directly hurt by the lockout. They held large gatherings in protest and tried, as usual, to appeal for public support. The Nationalist regime responded quickly and organized mediation, which ended with the BAT's acceptance of the following three conditions: (1) acknowledgement of the trade union's right to represent workers; (2) no dismissal of workers after resumption of work; and (3) offering workers two days' pay as compensation for the lockout. 86 However, the story did not end here.

Labor-capital disputes arose again at BAT in October 1927 when the Company did not fulfil all the above conditions and evolved into a large-scale strike at BAT's various factories. The Company called in British troops. In a statement, the strikers identified BAT as "British imperialist capitalists" and accused it of not only exploiting Chinese workers but also resisting Chinese government's taxation and therefore affronting China's dignity. With the wide support from "various circles" (gejie) of Shanghai, who set up a support committee as in any cases of strikes involving foreign

enterprises, workers organized pickets and enforced a boycott of the Company's tobacco products. What was noticeable was that the Labor Bureau under the Nationalist central government persuaded the (Chinese) Nanyang Brothers' Tobacco Company to donate 300,000 yuan to the strike workers and Ma Chaojun, the Bureau's director, personally contributed 20,000 yuan to the strike fund. The GMD Shanghai Unification Committee also directly provided financial support for union activities. So, as Perry shows, "Government backing bolstered the union leaders' confidence in challenging BAT management"; they "waged an escalating propaganda war against the company. Proclamations were issued frequently and immediately reprinted in all the major newspapers", disclosing a feeling that seems to have transcended native place-based parochialism. For example, one such proclamation says, "We have progressed from economic struggle to political struggle, from a labor dispute to an international issue. Having tasted the bitter oppression of international capitalism, we fight as vanguards in the struggle against it". 87 Eventually, BAT gave in. In the early 1928, with the mediation of Nationalist Finance Minister Song Ziwen and Shanghai local authorities, representatives from both BAT and the trade union reached an agreement that provided a variety of guarantees for the welfare and rights of

87 Ma Chaojun, op cit., pp. 727-729; Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, pp. 155, 158.
workers. It was in the very first article of this agreement that the trade union issue was addressed. The article stated that workers had the legitimate right to form trade unions and that the unions were organizations to represent and promote workers' interests. 88

Apparently, the legitimacy of unions was a major concern of workers in disputing with BAT. Given that the workers prevailed in such dispute largely with the mediation of Nationalist state agencies, the latter favored the existence of trade unions within BAT. Such a stand of the state could be explained mainly by its intention to appease workers and enlist their support and to convince foreign capitalists that the Chinese state really counted. Specifically, the Nationalist state expected to use trade unions as a check on the Company's power and force it, through union agitations, to accept the state-set tax rates. Such a motive for the intervention of the Chinese state did not escape the British side. According to a memorandum on the meeting between BAT's representative and British Consul General in Shanghai (November 18, 1927), the latter believed that the strike at BAT was not a result of dissatisfaction of Chinese workers, for workers' wages and other welfare at BAT were at least the same as in other enterprises if not better. In view of the trade union's propaganda, which linked the taxation issue and

88 Ma Chaojun, op. cit., pp. 789-780.
the strike and the boycott of BAT's products, "the Nanjing government is exploiting trade unions as an economic instrument against the Company", even though the Chinese authorities deny that they are so doing. Later in May 1930, in a letter to the Municipal Council (Gongbuju) of the International Settlement, BAT inferred that the Chinese government might be behind another strike at BAT. The 110-day strike broke out just as the Nationalist regime was negotiating with BAT on taxation and it ended only when an agreement was reached between the two sides and put into effect. Information from BAT's archives also suggests that Shanghai Nationalist Party Branch, with the intention of securing a social basis for its power, allotted some income it received from governmental taxation departments to trade union members at BAT. Some major leaders of the Party Branch obtained their power position mainly with the support of trade unions.

The Nationalist regime's leniency towards trade unions and workers in BAT should also be accounted for by Chinese workers' nationalism. As indicated above, when labor disputes arose at BAT, workers regarded themselves as victims of


90 Ibid., pp. 1216-1217.
"foreign imperialists" and turned to seek public support. Such a technique immediately evoked response from the Chinese public, which the state felt difficult to ignore and easy to turn to its own advantage.

The above situation repeated itself in the years to come. The British American Tobacco Company (BAT) in Shanghai could not help complaining that Chinese newspapers depicted the company's relationship with workers not so much as a capital-labour relationship as one "between China and imperialist countries" and foreign employers as "the chief representatives of these countries". "It is out of their instinctive distaste for foreign enterprises" that many newspapers and organizations and even the city (Nationalist) party branch showed their support for trade unions in foreign enterprises.  

91 In 1934, Wang Jingwei, head of the Nationalist Executive Yuan, disclosed in a secret order that trade unions in BAT's factories in Shanghai were "perfect in organization" and "made the capitalists' high-handed policy" of suppressing union activities "futile". The Shanghai city authorities made no efforts to suppress these trade unions. 92 Indeed, the unions in BAT were so strong that its managers had to adopt a cooperative attitude towards them and to consult with them over labor issues. This partly accounted for the relatively

91 Ibid., pp. 1205, 1229.
92 Ibid., pp. 1237-1238.
good working conditions of workers in the Company: good safety equipment, few work accidents, regular work hour, various rewards and stipend. 93

The fact that trade unions at BAT enjoyed the state’s backing did not necessarily mean that they were controlled or manipulated by the state. The principal union leader, a standing committee member, was chosen through election from executive members, who were in turn elected by workers’ congress. The standing committee member took charge of the union’s routine work and got his pay from neither the state nor the management but from the union (through membership fees). The union’s functions were economic and cultural, involving such things as job recommendation, relief for wounded and sick workers, libraries, clubs, and schools for both adults and children. The Workers’ Children’s School was jointly administered by union and management. 94

The preceding discussion has focused on the trilateral relations among the Chinese state, Chinese workers, and the BAT, suggesting that the Nationalist regime tried to seek alliance with Chinese workers in wrangling with the management of the BAT over tobacco taxation. There was still another issue that often soured the relations between the Nationalist

93 Luo Chuanhua, Jinri zhongguo zhi laogong wenti, p. 102, 105-106.
94 Luo Chuanhua, Jinri zhongguo zhi laogong wenti, pp. 102-104.
state and foreign business community and compelled the former to sponsor trade unions in foreign enterprises. That was their competition for power to mediate labor disputes in foreign enterprises within the concessions.

In Shanghai, as of April 1935, about two-thirds of the factories were located in concessions, mainly in the International Settlement (British and American concessions). The Settlement and the French Concession constituted a state within state, independent from the Chinese authorities. Relying on their extraterritoriality, both the concession administrations and foreign enterprises within the concessions tried to obstruct the intrusion of Chinese state power. When the Bureau of Social Affairs under the Shanghai Nationalist government made the first attempt in 1928 to tackle problems concerning labor-capital relations in the concessions, the administrative authorities of the International Settlement immediately showed their strong opposition, considering such attempts as dangerous and damaging to the concessions' administration. They claimed that the Bureau of Social Affairs had no right to extend its functions into the concessions and that foreign employers would not accept its mediation. In 1931, the Shanghai city government decided to inspect all factories including those within concessions according to the newly-promulgated Factory Inspection Law. This again provoked resistance from the authorities of the International
Settlement and French Concessions. Some foreign employers shared the same kind of hostility to Chinese intervention. For example, the French Tramway Company in Shanghai regarded foreign authorities in concessions rather than the Chinese state as the only legitimate mediator of labor disputes. As far as the Nationalist regime was concerned, failure to thrust into foreign enterprises in concessions would not only mean that its power was severely limited with foreigners, but also would undermine its authority over Chinese enterprises. Being equally loath to state intervention, Chinese capitalists would protest it on the excuse of maintaining equality between foreigners and Chinese. Under such circumstances, the Nationalist local state bureaucrats, besides continuing to bargain directly with concession administrations, turned to manoeuvre other forces, particularly trade unions, as a counterbalance to foreign capitalists. On this point, I would refer to the case of the French Tramway Company.

The French Tramway Company, with more than 1,500 workers, was a major foreign enterprise in Shanghai between the 1920s and the 1940s. Like other foreign enterprises, it was troubled by labor disputes and unrest from time to time. Deeply distrustful of the Chinese state and fearful of its

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95 Zhang Zhongli et al., *Jindai Shanghai chengshi yanjiu* (An urban study of modern Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990), pp. 830-832.
penetration, the Company persisted in rejecting the Shanghai city government's participation in mediation of these disputes. Instead, it preferred to seek assistance from such figures as Du Yuesheng. Between 1926 and 1935, the Company got Du involved in mediating seven major strikes. 96 Despite the adamant resistance from the Company, the Shanghai city authorities still managed to make its influence felt there, largely through union activities. In 1928, the City Party Branch sent Liu Yun, a standing committee member and concurrent secretary of the Reorganization Committee for Shanghai Unions, to the French Company. Liu first recruited some workers into the GMD and then instructed them to form a trade union on October 4, 1928. The union was supposed to be a "yellow" one in the sense that it was sponsored by the GMD. However, such official sponsorship did not make it lose its popular character. Actually, the union became actively involved in championing workers' interests. The first challenge it met was the murder of a Chinese trolleybus driver by a drunken French seaman. Taking advantage of this case, the trade union initiated a strike and raised sixteen demands, the first of which was "acknowledgement of trade union's legitimacy to represent workers". Others were about wage increase, eight-hour work day, double pay for holiday work and coverage of expenses for work accidents and the like. The

96 Zhang Zhongli et al., op cit., p. 860.
strike lasted about twenty-four days and ended with the mediation by Du Yuesheng on the request of the French company management and with some concessions made by the latter. 97

In July 1930, the trade union in the French Tramway Company organized another strike among workers at the Maintenance Department (jiwubu), one of the two major "departments" of the Company, demanding an increase in wages to offset the inflation in the rice market. The strike earned support of the Nationalist Shanghai authorities and "yellow" unions from other enterprises. The latter formed a Committee for Supporting the Strike and expressed their determination to "carry the strike against the French capitalists through to the end". The strike caused enormous troubles with water and electricity supply and public transport in the French Concession. On July 12, the Concession fell into darkness for three hours due to the cutoff of electricity supply. Later, when French policemen from the French Concession opened fire on strikers, the strike expanded into the other department, the Department of Traffic, and some offices at the French Company involving 1,600 Chinese workers and white-collar

clerks.

With the strike proceeding and obtaining new momentum, the French management became more worried about the Company's economic losses and began to soften its attitude towards workers. The Nationalist city authorities also altered their position to the strike: from tacit support to containment. Fearing that a continued strike would lead to serious disruption of peace and social stability as well as decrease in revenues from business taxes, both the City Party Branch and city government attempted to bring the long strike to an end. On the one hand, they requested that the Nationalist central government negotiate with the French embassy to China and on the other, they sent representatives to the French General Consulate at Shanghai, discussing ways to end the strike. In the end, an agreement was reached at a meeting of representatives from Shanghai city government, the union and the French General Consulate (its representative was Du Yuesheng). According to the agreement, the French company was to make a few concessions on workers' welfare such as wage increase, the retirement pension, and no dismissal of workers without legitimate reasons. With the conclusion of the agreement came the end of the 57-day strike in the French Tramway Company. 98

98 Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 3, pp. 994-997; Shanghai fadian gongren yundong shi (A history of
The frequent and long strikes in the French Tramway Company again testified that Chinese workers and trade unions in foreign enterprises were characterized by a high degree of militancy. Among the reasons for such militancy was that the Chinese state often chose to stand behind Chinese workers and used the latter as an ally in its confrontation with foreigners. Such an understanding may supplement some existing explanations of the subject, which are inspiring but not necessarily complete. Elizabeth Perry attempts to link labor militancy (as embodied in high frequency of strikes) to the prosperity of the British American Tobacco Company (BAT). In her opinion, the enormous financial success of and high wages at the BAT stimulated workers' high expectation for better treatment, which in turn drove them to strikes. Sherman Cochran attributes the high level of labor unrest in foreign businesses to the Chinese workers' commitment to economic nationalism, which meant that they were willing to go on strike against foreign businesses as rivals of their Chinese counterparts. 99

The above discussion suggests that the Nationalist regime was in conflict or competition with capitalists, labor movements in the French Tramway Company in Shanghai), pp. 108-110.

especially foreign capitalists. To overwhelm its capitalist rivals, the regime felt it expedient to make alliance with workers, specifically to allow them to form trade unions and to stage strikes. Workers in turn could exploit the Nationalist state's backing in bargaining with their employers for the legitimacy of trade unions and ultimately for improving their working and living conditions. The Nationalist regime's strategy of allying with workers implied that its power succumbed to restraints from both capitalists and workers.

In this section, I dealt with the Nationalist regime as distinguished from other forces (workers, capitalists, foreigners). Instead of being unitary or homogeneous, the regime was deeply flawed with internal divisions and factional struggles, which again worked in favor of workers and trade unions.
Chapter 5 Partisan Politics of the Guomindang Regime and Trade Unions: the Case of Qingdao

The divisions and factional struggles within the GMD regime were manifold and prevalent. In this chapter, I will focus on the activities of the "Nationalist Reorganization Faction" and the rivalry between the party organization and government, as they directly affected the labor movement and specifically trade unions.

1. The Reorganization Faction and the Revival of Union Activities

The Nationalist Reorganization Faction (Guomindang gaizu pai) emerged and was active during 1928-1932 as a direct result of the power struggle between Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei. Such a struggle could be traced back to 1925 when Sun Yat-sen died and both Chiang and Wang competed for being Sun's legitimate successor. While Chiang controlled the military power, the leadership of the Nationalist Party and government

100 As Lloyd E. Eastman suggested, factionalism was a characteristic character of Chinese politics in general. There was an exception with the GMD regime. "The KMT's quest for a political system was marked by rivalries and jealousies of cliques and factions". Chiang Kai-shek chose to foster such divisions as a technique of control. See his book, The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937 (Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 31. 301.

101 Its formal and complete name was Zhongguo Guomindang gaizu tongzhi hui (Comrades' Society for Reorganizing the Chinese Nationalist Party).
was dominated by some "left"-oriented Nationalists including Wang Jingwei. Twice Wang managed to become the principal party and government leader, first at Guangzhou in July 1925 and then at Wuhan in April 1927. The GMD regime formally split when Chiang Kai-shek abandoned the Nationalist policy of "alliance with Russia and accommodation with the CCP" and began to "clear the GMD of communists" in April 1927. In that same month, Chiang Kai-shek set up a new Nationalist government at Nanjing as a rival of the Wuhan Nationalist government under Wang Jingwei. Wang claimed to follow Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and his policy of allying with the Soviet Union and the CCP. In July 1927, Wang Jingwei gave up this policy and turned to purge communists. In September, his government moved to Nanjing and merged with the government under Chiang Kai-shek. In February 1928, the Fourth Plenum of the Second Nationalist Congress convened in Nanjing and formally confirmed Chiang's legitimacy as the top leader of the Nationalist Party, government and military. The GMD regime seemed unified under Chiang. This was only an illusion, however, for beneath such outward unity, the power struggle between Chiang and Wang continued.

Wang Jingwei originally expected to share power with

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Chiang in the newly-formed Nanjing Nationalist government. To his disappointment, however, he found himself and his followers squeezed out of the leadership of party and government by Chiang. Wang’s faction was only assigned the job of taking charge of the Central Committee for Popular Movements, and even that proved insecure. A resolution on party reorganization passed by the Fourth Plenum of the Second Nationalist Congress stipulated that popular movements should be discontinued during the party reorganization. Seeing no hope of obtaining any influence within the Nationalist central government, Wang Jingwei left Nanjing first for Guangdong and then for France, while some of his key supporters such as Chen Gongbo and Gu Mengzong sought to regain their power through other means. In the summer of 1928, they formed the Reorganization Faction in Shanghai, which soon became an influential political force within the GMD. Under the pretext of restoring the "revolutionary spirit of Sun Yat-sen in reorganizing the GMD in 1924", the Reorganization Faction advocated that the GMD under Chiang Kai-shek be reorganized and transformed into a party based on the "alliance of peasants, workers and urban petit bourgeoisie" and that popular movements be restored.  

103 Such a doctrine was

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103 Chen Gongbo, "Dangde gaizu yuanze" (Pinciples on party reorganization) (July 8, 1928); "Zhongguo guomingdang gaizu tongzhi hui diyi ci quanguo daibiao dahui xuanyan" (The manifesto of the GMD Reorganization Society at the first
particularly appealing to young intellectuals or students, who felt disappointed with Chiang Kai-shek's betrayal of Sun's policies. At least initially, they showed great enthusiasm for joining the Reorganization Faction. Later they began to realize that the Faction's leaders were primarily concerned to undermine Chiang's authority and to gain a share of the power of the Nationalist regime rather than to restore revolution as envisioned by Sun Yat-sen. Organizationally, the Reorganization Faction was modeled on the GMD. It had headquarters at Shanghai and maintained branches nationwide at provincial and city levels.  

Shandong province was an important base of the Reorganization Faction. This had to do with the influence of Wang Leping, a Shandong native and a leading figure of the Reorganization Faction. Once a close follower of Sun Yat-sen and the principal leader of GMD in Shandong in 1924 and 1925, Wang Leping later became a staunch supporter of Wang Jingwei and a key member of the Reorganization Faction. He first took


104 He Hanwen, "Gaizu pai huiyi" (Recollections on the Reorganization Faction); the Propaganda Department of the GMD Central Committee, "Gaizu pai zhi zuie and yinmu" (The Reorganization Faction's crimes and conspiracy), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 385-397, 398-405.
up the leading position with the Faction’s Organization Department and then in 1929 succeeded Chen Gongbo as the Faction’s top leader. Even though he worked at the Shanghai headquarters of the Reorganization Faction, Wang Leping’s power base was in Shandong. Wang enjoyed high prestige and wide support among the Nationalists in Shandong partly due to his experience working with Sun Yat-sen and his unusual organizational ability and, perhaps more important, because of the strong provincialism of the Shandong people, the Nationalists in that province were ready to accept their prestigious fellow native’s leadership. Moreover, Wang Leping managed to expand his influence in Shandong through his cousin Fan Yusui and his brother Wang Shenlin. Fan originally served as a propaganda cadre at the Reorganization Faction’s headquarters and then went back to Shandong with the mission of establishing local organizations. As for Wang Shenlin, he had been a member of the Standing Committee of Qingdao Nationalist Party Branch since 1927. In 1928, following his cousin Wang Leping’s footsteps, he joined the Reorganization Faction. The Qingdao Nationalist Party Branch transformed into a local branch of the Reorganization Faction with Wang Shenlin as its major leader, although it still maintained its name of “Nationalist Qingdao Party Branch”. Generally, the

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Reorganization Faction worked overtly at the central level and covertly at local levels.

As an opposition faction within the GMD, the Reorganization Faction aspired to regain the leadership of the GMD from Chiang Kai-shek. Indeed, the Faction managed to penetrate and control some local party branches. Compared to Chiang and some remnant warlord forces, however, the Faction was too weak in the sense that it did not have military means at its disposal. To compensate for such weakness, the Reorganization Faction turned to exploit other resources, particularly popular movements. Largely due to its efforts, the labor movement and trade unions in cities like Qingdao revived and gained a new momentum.

In Qingdao, members of the Reorganization Faction got deeply involved in the mobilization of workers. Posing as Sun Yat-sen’s legitimate successors and workers’ representatives, they put forward platforms concerning workers’ immediate economic interests such as an eight-hour workday, a wage increase and the improvement of treatment and welfare of workers. In addition, they did not miss the fact that workers in Qingdao had suffered repeated crackdowns by Japanese-backed warlords and generally showed hatred toward the Japanese, especially the Japanese troops that were still stationed in Qingdao. Therefore, Qingdao’s Reorganization Faction also engaged in anti-Japanese propaganda and campaigns with the
intention to make their own interests look identical with those of workers and to win workers' support. From the outset, the Faction paid enormous attention to the trade union work. In August 1928, it set up a preparatory committee for a citywide labor organization, to be called Qingdao General Trade Union. Its members infiltrated among workers of various industries or enterprises such as railway, telegram, post, tobacco as well as cotton and silk mills, organizing grassroots trade unions. The unions, especially those in the Japanese-owned factories, usually conducted their activities clandestinely. In Dakang Cotton Mill, for example, union members exchanged information with each other or planned schedules for action in their dormitories or held gatherings in the name of learning martial arts. To avoid suppression by the Japanese troops that were still deployed in Japanese enterprises, union members resorted to some moderate means to force the Japanese management to make concessions: slowdowns and damaging machines. 106

On March 27, 1929, the Reorganization Faction formally proclaimed the founding of the Qingdao General Trade Union, with about 4,000 members. Trade unions under the

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106 Han Yumin, "Gaizupai zai Dakang shachang de huodong" (The Reorganization Faction's activities at the Dakang Cotton Mill); Zhu Ziheng, "Dakang shachang gonghui he gongren bagong douzheng qingkuang" (The trade union at the Dakang Cotton Mill and worker strikes), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 297-298, 299-300.
Reorganization Faction maintained strict procedures in recruiting members to guarantee their nature as workers' organization. Only workers were eligible for union membership, while those keeping close connections with the management such as clerks or white-collar workers and foremen were excluded from unions. In Japanese enterprises, trade unions tended to be better organized. They maintained coherent leadership organs at the factory level, executive committees, which in turn extended their thrust into workshops or other smaller work units through special union representatives or union group leaders. In addition, trade unions in Japanese enterprises came to set up multi-tiered pickets. Many union leaders were workers who had participated in the 1925 worker strikes in Qingdao. 107

The Reorganization Faction seemed successful in establishing its leadership over the labor movement in Qingdao and therefore in accumulating capital and building a social basis in its competition for power with the GMD under Chiang Kai-shek. Besides its effective strategy (showing great concern for workers' economic interests and pandering to their anti-Japanese sentiments as well as identifying itself as the orthodox successor of Sun Yat-sen), the Faction's success, at least temporarily, also counted on the unique political situation in Qingdao, which may be best identified as fluid.

In early 1929, after the Nanjing Nationalist government and the Japanese envoy reached a settlement on the Jinan Massacre, the Japanese troops in Shandong began to withdraw, leaving the Japanese-backed Qingdao authorities (Jiaobao shangbu ju--Jiaobao Trading Port Bureau) in a vulnerable position. The latter, especially its police forces, seeing their days of government numbered, were inclined to shy away from interfering in union activities in order to leave themselves a way out. Moreover, the Nanjing government did not formally take over Qingdao until April 15, 1929. It was not surprising that before this date, the Reorganization Faction in Qingdao had experienced its "golden age" particularly in terms of its influence among workers.

The golden age of the Reorganization Faction in Qingdao came to an end when the Nanjing Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-shek expanded its mandate to that city in April of 1929. Considering the importance of Qingdao as a major naval and trading port, the Nanjing regime designated it as a special municipality (tebie shi) directly under the central government. As in any newly acquired city, the regime set up in Qingdao two major political organs, the City Party Branch (shi dangbu) and the city government. Their principal leaders were directly chosen by Chiang Kai-shek. The new Qingdao authorities took it as a priority to build and consolidate its local base and to get rid of all potential political rivals,
among whom were the Reorganization Faction and the trade unions under its influence. Upon the order from the Nanjing government, the Qingdao city authorities banned the Reorganization Faction and arrested and imprisoned its major leaders. It also stipulated that any city government organs should not recruit members of this faction or those with connections with the Faction. However, such high-handed measures did not completely eliminate the Reorganization Faction and especially its influence among workers. Some of its members slipped into factories and, through trade unions, engaged clandestinely in instigating labor unrest.  

Furthermore, the Nationalist Nanjing regime and Qingdao authorities took steps to bring labor movement under the official control and particularly to neutralize those trade unions under the influence of the Reorganization Faction. As in Shanghai, the Nanjing regime disbanded the citywide trade union, the Qingdao General Trade Union, and set up a new institution, the Reorganization Commission for Qingdao Unions, and charged it with the duty of supervising (registering and directing) all the city's trade unions. The Commission's members were appointed by the Qingdao Nationalist Party Branch

and directly responsible to it. As a city-level official trade union, the Commission endeavoured to make itself felt at the enterprise level. By September of 1930, it had organized 44 trade unions in the city's important industries and enterprises, including seven Japanese cotton mills and two factories of the British American Tobacco Company.

The above measures represented the efforts of the Nationalist state power (as a political force) to intrude into one important part of the social sphere, trade unions. Such intrusion seemed successful in the sense that the city bureaucrats formally asserted their authority or leadership over unions. The bureaucratic control, however, did not necessarily mean that unions would lose their popular character as workers' organizations and that they would cease to agitate among workers for their own interests. On the contrary, the early years of the Nationalist rule witnessed enormous labor unrest and union activities in Qingdao. Apart from the continued agitation from the underground Reorganization Faction members, this had to do with the division and power struggles within the Nationalist local

109 "Qingdao tebie shi gonghui zhengli weiyuanhui zuzhi tiaoli" (Organizational regulations regarding the reorganization commission for Qingdao unions), in Qingdao Dangshi Ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 361-362.

110 Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 77-80.
leadership, specifically between the city government and the City Party Branch.

In Qingdao, these two major official institutions were at loggerheads with each other for the dominant position in deciding on city affairs. From the outset, the city government seemed to have controlled real or coercive powers, particularly the military and police forces. Some mayors of Qingdao came from military background. For example, the first mayor, Wu Siyu, was concurrently the commander of the military police corps. Another mayor Shen Honglie was simultaneously in command of Nationalist naval forces in Qingdao. Shen had been naval vice-commander-in-chief of the Northeastern Army. By contrast, the role of the City Party Branch was primarily ideological, that is, to disseminate Nationalist beliefs and to create some ideological consensus between party members and the masses as well. The City Party Branch was also assigned the function of supervising the performance of city government and of directing popular movements. In theory, the city government had to accept the guidance of the City Party Branch. In practice, the latter did not have much authority over the government. What the City Party Branch could do was to report to the Nationalist central government on the behavior of the city government and to request for central arbitration or interference. Here was a contradiction: the institution (the City Party Branch) with a higher political
profile was without real power. Such an arrangement probably stemmed from one of Chiang Kai-shek's favourite tactics—"divide and rule". Chiang may deliberately create or encourage divisions between local officials and make them check each other.

The city government and the City Party Branch in Qingdao differed from each other in their attitudes towards workers' movements. The former favoured a policy of limiting or suppressing such movements and particularly trade union activities out of consideration for maintaining social order and peace, which the government regarded as its duty. Perhaps it also intended to undermine the power basis of the City Party Branch by neutralizing the labor movement. To the Party Branch, such a high-handed labor policy was not acceptable, for it deemed the labor movement as within its own sphere of influence and a potential source of power. Aspiring to get the upper hand in its rivalry with the city government, the Party Branch chose to encourage the workers' movement and to win trade unions as an ally. This point was made clear in an article by Wu Rencang, head of the Training Department of Qingdao Party Branch, in 1929. He maintained that the Nationalist party organization not only had the authority to guide and supervise the masses but also had the responsibility to do this with the government. "China's popular movement must accept the Nationalist Party's doctrine and its training".
"Reorganization, guidance, supervision and training" of all popular organizations "are within the jurisdiction of the Party Branch". Wu also suggested that the city government had no right to dismiss any trade unions that were organized under the Party Branch. 111

Indeed, the Nationalist Qingdao Party Branch was behind the labor movement and contributed considerably to the resurgence of union activities. It did this through several ways. First, the City Party Branch came to tolerate the left-oriented Reorganization Faction, which also claimed to support workers' movement as indicated above. Unlike the city government which favored blatant suppression of the Reorganization Faction, the City Party Branch attempted to incorporate members of this faction into its own camp as a new leverage in competing with the city government. Taking advantage of such a generous attitude from the City Party Branch, members of the Reorganization Faction emerged from underground and became a major force in agitating workers in the cloak of Nationalist Party. Secondly, the City Party Branch often served as a check on the city government's impulse to suppress union activities. Most important, the City Party Branch directly got itself involved in mobilizing

workers through the City Trade Union Reorganization Commission under its leadership and various Trade Union Reorganization Commissions at the enterprise level. Partly due to the work of the City Party Branch, the labor movement in Qingdao soon experienced another tide between July and November of 1929 when a large-scale worker strike occurred at Japanese-owned enterprises and lasted nearly four months.

2. The 1929 Labor Unrest

As in the warlord period, Qingdao's economy was characterized by foreign, particularly Japanese domination in the later 1920s and early 1930s, even after Qingdao was under the administration of the Nationalist Nanjing regime. Foreigners still controlled 80% of the city's industrial capital and 80% of this foreign capital was vested, in turn, in the Japanese. There were about 23 Japanese enterprises in Qingdao. The Japanese business people were primarily engaged in the cotton textile industry. In the 1930s, there were seven Japanese cotton mills in Qingdao, employing more than 200,000 Chinese workers. Other major Japanese-owned enterprises included two match plants, an ice-making factory, an egg company, some kilns and tobacco factories. Moreover, the

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Japanese filled many high-level posts of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway administration and therefore could influence significantly the operation of the railway, even though it was formally under Chinese jurisdiction. In addition, the Japanese dominated Qingdao's commercial and financial sectors and virtually monopolized its shipping industry. Among other major foreign businesses were two branch factories of the British American Tobacco Company.

It turned out again that the Japanese enterprises served as the main arena for trade union agitation in Qingdao in the years of Nationalist rule. This should be first accounted for by some changes in the conditions of Japanese enterprises that directly affected workers. From 1929, Japanese owners began to carry out "rationalization of production" in their enterprises, acquiring new equipment, renovating technology of production and strengthening labor administration. The immediate result was the increase in the intensity of labor and layoff of workers in large numbers. In Dakang Cotton Mill, for example, the number of workers was reduced by one-third from 5,070 in April 1925 to 3,385 in April 1929. While the

113 "Zhongyang xunshi yuan xunshi Qingdao baogao" (The Central Committee inspector's report on Qingdao) (November 1929); "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu quansheng zhengzhi jingji zhuangkuang de baogao" (CCP Shandong Provincial Committee's report on political and economic situations of Shandong Province) (February 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 67-78, 107-115; Minguo ribao, November 4, 1929.
intensity of labor increased, workers’ minimum daily wages were lowered, from 0.26 yuan in 1925 to 0.18 yuan in 1929. One technique that the Japanese owners used to reduce total wages was to frequently replace workers of long standing with new ones and therefore to eschew the need to raise senior workers’ wages. In 1929, about half of the workers (1,667 out of 3,385) in Dakang Cotton Mill were those whose standing did not exceed three years. After all, the Japanese felt no difficulty in finding young replacements for senior workers, given that there existed in Qingdao a large reserve army of labor, who were driven to the city by rural bankruptcy resulting from both natural and human-made disasters especially wars. In addition, by 1929, workers in Japanese enterprises lost some benefits such as lunch break they gained during the strikes of 1925. Indeed, workers had their grievances and they were ready to take actions against their Japanese employers as soon as the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Qingdao was completed on May 20, 1929. In pursuing their own interests, workers found ready allies first in the Reorganization Faction and then in the Nationalist City Party Branch, who were equally interested in labor movement and in seeking alliance with workers. It was against such background that the 1929

labor unrest in Japanese enterprises occurred.

The labor unrest began in Lingmu Silk Mill in July 19, 1929, when the factory management fired some workers under the pretext that they were late at work. The underlying reason for the management's action was actually its fear of eruption of organized labor movement. These workers were trade union activists and came late because they had been participating in a party member training meeting organized by the City Party Branch. Under the instigation of GMD members affiliated either with the Reorganization Faction or the City Party Branch, workers stopped work and insisted that the Japanese management revoke the dismissal of workers. They went further to campaign for shorter working hours, a wage increase, and punishment of some foremen. Instead of making any concessions to workers, the Lingmu Silk Mill declared a lockout. To express their support for workers at Lingmu Silk Mill, worker representatives from other Japanese enterprises gathered at the City Party Branch and planned to stage a joint strike. On their part, another eight Japanese enterprises including six cotton mills (Dakang, Naigai Wata Kaisha, Longxing, Zhongyuan, Fuji and Baolai) and two match plants, under the encouragement of the Japanese Consul General at Qingdao, quickly took concerted action and joined Lingmu Silk Mill in closing down their factories on July 21 and 22, 1929. The lockout resulted in the temporary unemployment of about 20,000 Chinese workers.
Meanwhile, the Japanese owners fired more than 200 workers. 115

What seems striking was the quick action, unyielding attitude and unity on the Japanese part in handling the unrest of Chinese workers. Actually, the Japanese were quite militant in the sense that they resorted to the general lockout before the Chinese workers declared a "joint strike". While the immediate victims of the lockout were workers, the Japanese used the lockout not so much against the workers as against the Chinese local authorities, particularly the City Party Branch. Specifically, they attempted to bring pressure to bear upon local Chinese officials and force them to take tough measures to prevent the labor movement at Japanese enterprises. The Japanese believed that the City Party Branch and the city-level Trade Union Reorganization Commission under it worked as the driving forces of the anti-Japanese labor movement and that they were "becoming ever more outspoken in stirring up enterprise-level trade unions" to "conduct slowdowns, strikes and violent activities". The Japanese employers once raised the request, via the Japanese General Consulate, to the Chinese authorities that the latter should take effective steps to suppress the labor movement. They were only disappointed to find that the Chinese authorities made no such efforts due to the opposition from the City Party Branch.

115 Shenbao, July 21, 22, 23, 29, 1929; Fangzhi shibao, July 25, 1929.
Under such circumstances, the Japanese employers were forced to seek other ways such as lockout to exert more pressure on Chinese local officials. 116

The Japanese technique of lockout proved effective. Worrying that large-scale unemployment would disturb order and social stability and therefore undermine the legitimacy of their power, the Nationalist Qingdao officials including leaders of the City Party Branch were anxious to negotiate with the Japanese on resumption of work. To reach a quick settlement, they no longer insisted that dismissal of workers be approved by the City Party Branch. As far as the Japanese were concerned, it was equally desirable to end the lockout as soon as possible to avoid more economic losses. Considering that the Chinese officials were extremely sensitive about face-saving, the Japanese agreed not to use the words "dismissal of workers". Instead, they changed such words into "resignation of workers". With concessions from the Chinese authorities, the six Japanese cotton mills resumed operation on July 24, 1929. 117 However, this did not last long. A new


round of dispute or confrontation between the Japanese employers and Chinese workers was soon to ensue.

In the above conflict, workers obviously gained nothing. Worse still, some of them were forced out of work by the Japanese employers in the name of "resignation". Those who remained employed became more resentful of the Japanese and took every chance to vent their indignation. Their most common technique was slowdowns. When Japanese managerial personnel were present in the workshop, workers kept machines going fast; when the Japanese were absent, workers slowed and even completely stopped the operation of machines. Such slowdowns expanded quickly in Japanese enterprises, particularly in the six cotton mills, involving most workshops and workers of both the day and night shift. The Japanese were surprised to find that even though the rate of workers' attendance at work became higher and higher, reaching above 90% in all companies, productivity dropped sharply. Eventually, the slowdown reached to such an extent that it was almost tantamount to a general stoppage. \(^{118}\) In addition, workers accelerated their activities in organizing and exploiting worker pickets against the Japanese management. The worker pickets particularly targeted the "Japanese running dogs", those who collaborated

\(^{118}\) Gong Yuzao and Ma Lu (translated from Japanese), Worker Movements at Qingdao, in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 313-340.
with the Japanese management such as foremen, white-collar clerks, and factory guards. More often than not, the worker pickets tended to punish these people with means of terror: detainment and beating. Many of these "collaborators" in Japanese cotton mills (75 per cent, according to some Japanese statistics) were so scared that they simply fled. Again, the Japanese found that behind the worker pickets' "terrorism" was the City Party Branch-propped union reorganization committees at both the city level and at the enterprise level. These committees were "instigating workers as in the past". They "recruited the dismissed workers into worker pickets" and used them to "prevent workers from going to work", "while the Chinese military policemen who were supposed to be guarding factories only looked on with folded arms". Claiming to act on the order of the Public Security Bureau, reorganization committee members violently took "honest Chinese foremen and clerks" to union headquarters, "beating and injuring them". 119

Indeed, the Japanese employers and consuls in Qingdao regarded the reorganization committees as a dangerous adversary and the source of all troubles in Japanese enterprises and therefore took pains to get rid of them. Specifically, the Japanese, often using Japanese newspapers in

Qingdao as a mouthpiece, accused the committees of being manipulated by Communists and demanded their dismissal, threatening that they would otherwise declare a second lockout. On their part, they firmly denied the charges of the Japanese. The city-level Reorganization Committee claimed, for example, that its members were carefully screened by the City Party Branch and there were absolutely no Communists among them. It made it clear that it would not suspend union activities and labor movement just because of the displeasure and opposition from the Japanese; if the latter chose to close down factories, unions should accelerate their activities and try their best to "fight to the end".  

Facing the increasingly restless labor force and militant trade unions as well as the inactivity of the Chinese authorities, the Japanese resorted again to an old technique. On August 4, 1929, the six Japanese cotton mills simultaneously declared the second lockout of unlimited duration. Later on, another five Japanese enterprises joined in the lockout. About 40,000 workers were thrown out of employment. Workers responded with large-scale rallies and demonstrations in front of the city government building. In a petition to the Bureau of Social Affairs and the City Party

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Branch, worker representatives put forward the following demands: (1) the city authorities let the Japanese know that they were not allowed to dismiss workers and especially union leaders after resumption of work; (2) the city authorities should mete out severe punishment to the "scabs" whom workers had captured and sent to the headquarters of military police; (3) those police officers who collaborated with the Japanese in suppressing workers be severely punished; and (4) trade unions be guaranteed security. The city officials indicated that they fully accepted workers' requests and promised to negotiate with the Japanese within the space of six days. 121 Meanwhile, worker pickets continued to "punish scabs" and even went further to surround the Japanese factories, retaining mail and scaring away Chinese kitchen staff and odd-job men who were hired by the Japanese. It was not surprising that the Japanese managerial personnel, clerks and their families complained that their daily life was disrupted by activities of worker pickets under the reorganization committees. 122

As usual, the confrontation between the Japanese employers and Chinese workers led to haggling between Japanese government agents in China and Chinese local authorities.

121 Shenbao, August 9, 1929.
Worriedly watching the chaotic situation in Japanese enterprises unfold, the Japanese Consul General at Qingdao again felt obliged to find some remedy. On August 7, he presented a request to the mayor of Qingdao Wu Siyu that worker pickets be completely dismissed and all labor movements be banned. Otherwise, he threatened, the Japanese factories could not be restored to operation and the Japanese navy would land in Qingdao to help control the situation. 123 Between August 16 and November 22, 1929, the Japanese Consul General made similar demands to Wu for five times, clearly showing his displeasure with the Qingdao government's inertia in suppressing the worker unrest. Each time, he complained that considering the continued "violence" on the part of worker pickets, the Chinese authorities had not fulfilled their duty to safeguard the property and personal safety of the Japanese. Instead of taking steps to ban the worker pickets, the Chinese military police officers seemed sympathetic to them. The Japanese Consul General warned that the Japanese would have no choice but seek "self-defense" if the city authorities continued to be inactive and the "harmful activities" of

123 Gong Yuzao and Ma Lu (translated from Japanese), Worker Movements at Qingdao, in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 313-340; Wei Rong, "Qingdao gongren de jieji douzheng" (Workers' class struggle at Qingdao) (September 1929); "A Telegram by Wu Siyu to the Executive Yuan of the Nanjing government" (August 7, 1929), ibid., pp. 45-48, 124-125.
Chinese workers remained unchecked. 124

The Japanese may be justified in blaming the Chinese Qingdao authorities for failing to disband the worker pickets as effectively and quickly as they expected. It was unfair, however, to charge indiscriminately that all Chinese local officials were inactive in the face of such a large-scale and complicated conflict between the Chinese workers and Japanese employers. The twenty or so telegrams that Wu Siyu, the mayor of Qingdao, sent within three months (August 7--November 8, 1929) to the Nanjing Nationalist government specifically on the city's labor movement testified that the Qingdao government was desperate to find a solution. On the same day (August 7) when the Japanese Consul General handed in the first request on disbanding the worker pickets, Wu Siyu called for a meeting of officials from the City Party Branch, the city government and the military police on how to deal with the worker movement. He proposed five measures: (1) the City Party Branch give a warning to workers and dissolve their pickets; (2) government agents be secretly dispatched to detect and punish "reactionary elements" among workers and to advise them to abide by law; (3) the military police should

124 "Letters of the Japanese General Consulate to the Qingdao City Government" (August 16, September 5, October 4, October 19, and November 22, 1929), (originally in Ma Fuxiang, A Brief Record of Qingdao's Worker Movement), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 136-140.
intervene if there were still people who attempted to "make pressure by organizing popular assemblies"; (4) the city government negotiate with the Japanese on reopening the factories; and (5) the unemployed workers be sent back to their native places to prevent them from making further "troubles." Following the meeting, the military police, on the order of Wu Siyu, arrested some worker representatives from the Japanese cotton mills as communist suspects.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Social Affairs directly within the city government arranged the dispatch of large numbers of unemployed workers back to their "ancestral home." On the other hand, the city government repeatedly urged the Japanese to get their factories back into operation but only found that its efforts were in vain. As late as early November 1929, the Japanese factories remained closed and the Chinese workers and their Japanese employers were still in a deadlock.

The ineffectiveness of the Qingdao city government in bringing the worker unrest in Japanese enterprises to a quick end derived, first of all, from the divisions within the city's political authorities. Specifically, the city government was facing the challenge or check from the City Party Branch, which was inclined to support the worker

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126 Shenbao, August 19, 13, 1929.
movement as a base of its power and to favor a hard line with the Japanese. The City Party Branch insisted that it was the Japanese who took the initiative in closing down their factories and dismissing workers and that they did so time and again out of their "imperialistic" nature. The Japanese would "reach out for a yard after taking an inch" and go further to suppress workers if "our side" (the Chinese authorities) makes one concession after another. Even though in a difficult situation, the Party was "obliged to strive for the interests of workers". The Reorganization Commission for Qingdao Unions under the City Party Branch, as an "institution representing workers' interests", was particularly "indignant" at the "repeated challenge from the Japanese".  

The Reorganization Commission was indeed hostile and uncompromising to the Japanese employers, which can be discerned in the seven terms that the Committee raised in negotiating with the Japanese on resumption of work: (1) the Japanese management recognize the right of trade unions to represent workers; (2) recruitment of workers be conducted through trade unions; without the consent of unions, neither hiring nor dismissal of workers be allowed; (3) the management subsidize trade unions with 500 yuan as funds for union activities, all fines by the management being handed over to unions for handling labor-capital relations; (4) workers be

127 Shenbao, August 12, 1929.
paid during the lockout, and dismissal be imposed upon those who went to work in the factories before a formal agreement on resumption of work is reached; (5) the management should not declare lockout without legitimate reason, should inform trade unions one month in advance and seek unions' approval if it chooses to close down factories, and besides must provide workers with subsidies; (6) trade unions should have "absolute freedom for assembly"; and (7) the rights that workers enjoyed previously should remain in effect. 128 Such conditions were rejected by the Japanese employers. Moreover, the Reorganization Commission for Qingdao Unions and its lower-level branch unions tried hard to frustrate the efforts of some Japanese employers to reopen their factories before accepting the above terms. It "posted notices in factory premises, strictly forbidding workers to resume work on their own". 129

In undertaking such activities, the unions at least received tacit support from the City Party Branch. In November of 1929, for example, the latter proposed to the city


129 Wu Siyu, "A Telegram to the Training Department of the GMD Central Committee" (October 29, 1929), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, p. 135.
government and the Nationalist Central government that Li Erkang, the head of Qingdao's Public Security Bureau, be dismissed from his position and be penalized for his alleged sabotage of the worker movement and for "ingratiateing himself with the Japanese". The City Party Branch indicated that its information about Li Erkang was based on the reports from "the Reorganization Commission for Unions and other lower-level trade unions". The charges against Li Erkang proved effective. He was soon dismissed. Another way that the City Party Branch exploited to support workers was to lay blame with the Japanese employers for their abuses of workers. Several times, it wrote to the city government listing the atrocities committed by the Japanese and urging the city government "to lodge a serious protest to the Japanese Consul General" and "to order the Public Security Bureau to safeguard workers from further Japanese abuses.

It seems paradoxical that, on the one hand, the Nationalist city government was anxious to settle the labor-capital confrontation in the Japanese enterprises and, on the other, the Nationalist City Party Branch was "adding fuel to

130 "Resolution of the City Party Branch of Qingdao on Demanding the Dismissal of the Head of Public Security Bureau Li Erkang by the City Government" (November 15, 1929) and its notes, in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, p. 150.

131 See the Letters by Wu Siyu to the Japanese Consul General at Qingdao (November 7 and 8, 1929), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 140-141.
the flames", encouraging workers, attacking the Japanese and checking the city government's efforts to restrain union activities. Such a paradox was, as suggested above, rooted in the fragmentation of the Nationalist local power structure and specifically in the division between the city government and the City Party Branch. In competing with the city government, the City Party Branch came to support the labor movement in order to enhance its own prestige and to expand its own power base. As some officials from the GMD Central Committee discovered, the City Party Branch in Qingdao "regarded the worker movement as its most important object of work (gongzuo duixiang)" and "spared no pains in sponsoring it"; some "principal city party officials tried to woo the trade unions in various way for the purpose of cultivating personal power". 132 Such efforts of the City Party Branch could not but compromise the ability of the city government to neutralize the labor movement and reinforce the militancy of workers and trade unions in Japanese enterprises. One question arises here: Why was the City Party Branch able to actively mobilize workers, often disregarding the authority of the city

government and the strong opposition from the Japanese? The answer partly lies in the fact that the City Party Branch enjoyed support from some key leaders at the Nationalist central government. This may be testified by the following example. On November 9, Funatsu Tatsuichiro, director-General of the Federation of Japanese Cotton Mill Owners Associations, went to Nanjing and expressed Japanese concern over the labor unrest in Qingdao to some Nationalist central leaders such as Chen Lifu. Particularly, he blamed the City Party Branch of Qingdao for its "inappropriate guidance" and the Trade Union Reorganization Commission for its instigation of workers. However, such charges seemed not to gain the ear of the Nationalist Party leaders. Instead, the latter tended to shield the local party organization at Qingdao. Chen Lifu held that the City Party Branch in Qingdao had repeatedly urged the Japanese employers to reopen their factories and workers' attitudes had also become moderate, whereas the Japanese remained obstinate.  

Nationalist Party leaders like Chen Lifu deemed the local party organizations as their own power basis and therefore were loath to see their reputation tarnished and their authority undermined.

As for the Japanese, they were equally divided on the issue of resumption of work. The Japanese Consul General at Qingdao and the director-General of the Federation of Japanese Cotton Mill Owners Associations (Funatsu Tatsuichiro) represented the hard line. They insisted that workers must return to work unconditionally and that Japanese enterprises should not reopen their factories unless the "bad elements" (unions and worker pickets) completely stopped their activities. Such a hard line seemed unpopular with the Japanese business community. Except for a few enterprises with sufficient capital such as Dakang, Zhongyuan and Lingmu, which even then only grudgingly supported the hard line, most Japanese employers favored a conciliatory position in dealing with Chinese local authorities and workers, expecting to end the lockout as soon as possible. Having already suffered heavy losses from the protracted lockout, they were worried that their enterprises would go bankrupt if the lockout continued. Since the middle of September 1929, two Japanese-owned cotton mills, Baolai and Longxiong, began to negotiate directly and independently (rather than through the Japanese government agency and the Chinese authorities) with trade unions and showed their readiness to accept all workers' conditions for resuming work. However, they did not succeed. In Baolai, the workers refused to go back to work while their fellow workers in other factories persisting in the struggle. In Longxiong,
the Japanese management was forced to suspend its plan to end the lockout under pressure from Funatsu Tatsuichiro, the director-General of the Federation of Japanese Cotton Mill Owners Associations, and the Japanese Consul General. They expected that the Chinese workers, unable to bear the ordeal of a longstanding suspension of employment, would eventually give in. Funatsu and the Japanese Consul General intended to subdue the unions and perhaps the Chinese authorities (the City Party Branch in particular) once and for all and so forestall any labor unrest at Japanese enterprises in the future. In public, however, the Japanese defended their position by pointing out that the Chinese City Party Branch and the city government were inconsistent with each other on the terms of negotiation and therefore that the labor unrest could not be successfully settled. They would rather wait.

By the middle of November 1929, the confrontation between the Chinese workers and the Japanese in Qingdao had lasted for more than three months. Both sides seemed exhausted and began to soften their stands. The chance for their reconciliation came when the Nationalist Nanjing government dismissed Wu Siyu as Qingdao's mayor for his "ineffectiveness" in settling the

134 Chenbao, September 10, November 18, 1929; Fangzhi shibao, October 7, 1929.

labor movement and replaced him with Ma Fuxiang. Being a newcomer in Qingdao, Ma was anxious to establish himself as a capable politician by solving the thorny disputes between the Chinese workers and the Japanese. Compared to his predecessor, Ma Fuxiang had more advantages. First, he could refer to the Trade Union Law, which was just promulgated in late October 1929, in dealing with both the Japanese and workers and especially trade unions. Second, Ma enjoyed more military backing. Besides once being a seasoned military strongman himself, Ma’s two sons were in command of large and crack military forces that Ma could use any time he felt proper. He actually ordered his son Ma Hongkui to deploy one brigade in Qingdao. The reason the Nationalist central regime under Chiang Kai-shek could tolerate Ma’s act of freely manoeuvring troops may be that Chiang attempted to use Ma in checking the Shandong provincial authorities under Chen Diaoyuan, whom Chiang found recalcitrant. Finally, Ma Fuxiang seemed more acceptable to the Japanese because of his inclination to cultivate an easy relationship with them.  

As soon as he arrived in Qingdao, Ma Fuxiang set about tackling the labor unrest. He made some statements

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136 Shenbao, December 2, 1929; "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu quan sheng zhengzhi jingji zhuangkuang de baogao" (CCP Shandong Provincial Committee’s report on political and economic situations of Shandong Province) (February 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 107-115.
specifically to workers, expressing his "concern" over workers' suffering from the long lockout and promising to solve the dispute "within the shortest period", "by peaceful means" and "without hurting fellow workers". Of course, Ma did not forget to use the tactic of "coupling threats with promises", as Chinese political authorities usually did under similar circumstances. He urged workers to remain "calm, peaceful, and orderly rather than to go extreme". To any "troublemakers", Ma Fuxiang warned, he would show no mercy and would mete out punishments according to law. "Trouble-makers must be totally eliminated". 137 Meanwhile, Ma resumed negotiations with the Japanese on November 23, 1929. Unlike his predecessor Wu Siyu who often got the City Party Branch involved, Ma chose to bypass this "left-oriented" institution and to arrange direct negotiations between the city government officials and the Japanese Consul General. With both sides being eager to end the impasse and willing to make concessions, the Chinese and Japanese soon reached an agreement on resumption of work, including the following points: (1) dismissal of 250 workers in the name of "voluntary resignation", each being given some meagre compensation (40 yuan for cotton mill workers, 20 for silk mill workers, 15 for

137 "Statements by Ma Fuxiang to Workers", (originally in Ma Fuxiang, A Brief Record of Worker Movements in Qingdao), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, 150-152.
match plant worker); (2) those returning to work be provided with subsidies ranging from two to four yuan; (3) the city government's and the City Party Branch's efforts of training workers be allowed should they not interrupt production.  

Obviously, the Chinese side made more concessions than the Japanese. It was not surprising that the workers felt betrayed by Ma Fuxiang and were reluctant to go back to work on the scheduled date of November 27, 1929. Ma had to deploy many military policemen and troops under his son in order to enforce the agreement on resumption of work. Even though workers did return to work under the military pressure, they harbored deep resentment and were ready for new unrest. Like workers, the City Party Branch and the Reorganization Commission under its leadership also frowned upon Ma for his conciliatory attitude towards the Japanese and especially for his arbitrariness in deciding upon the terms of negotiation. Therefore, they were prepared to undermine Ma's position by continuing instigation of labor movement. Members from the City Party Branch and the Trade Union Reorganization Commission again infiltrated the workers and specifically

138 "Zhongri shuangfang yiding rishang jiu chang fugong zhi banfa" (An agreement between Chinese and Japanese on resumption of work in the nine Japanese factories) (November 23, 1929); "Riling tichu guanyu jiu chang fugong zhi liaojie shixiang" (Memorandum by the Japanese Consul General on resumption of work in the nine Japanese factories), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, p.180.
advised them to use slowdowns in dealing with their Japanese employers. In the face of the resurgent wave of slowdowns and the increasing waste of materials, the Japanese turned directly to the city government for help. The latter in turn sent inspectors to the Japanese factories and to make investigations of the alleged labor unrest. What the government inspectors discovered was that the workers were working in high spirits. As soon as they left, however, the workers became lax again and went on with the slowdown as usual. Considering that their factories just resumed operation after three months of close-down, the Japanese felt it would not be in their interests to resort to a new round of lockouts. Instead, they decided to take a more conciliatory position and to negotiate directly with the city-level Trade Union Reorganization Commission under the City Party Branch rather than with the city government. In the process of negotiation, the Japanese side made more concessions: (1) recognition of trade unions' right to represent workers; (2) rehiring some dismissed workers; (3) increasing workers' monthly wages by 3.5 yuan; (4) trade unions' approval for recruitment or dismissal of workers; (5) compensation for workers injured in work accidents. With the signing of this new agreement, the Trade Union Reorganization Commission claimed a victory and called on workers in Japanese
enterprises to formally resume work. 139

It seemed that the city government officials did not feel relieved with the end of the nearly four-month labor unrest. Instead, they were deeply worried about recurrence of such unrest in the future and put it as a priority on their agenda to find ways of solving labor-capital disputes. From December 13 to 16, Qingdao’s mayor Ma Fuxiang and other officials from the Public Security Bureau and the Bureau of Social Affairs held successive meetings on the labor issue with three groups of people, enterprise owners, foremen and workers. On each occasion, they posed as patrons of both workers and capitalists and stressed labor-capital cooperation as the keynote of the official labor policy. In their speeches to the representatives of employers on December 12, the city government officials acknowledged that the central issue in Qingdao’s labor movement was the formation of trade unions. While workers valued trade unions as a necessary safeguard of their own interests, employers and foremen held them as an anathema. To avoid further contention on this issue, the city government officials urged "employers to accept that workers can form their own trade unions according to the Trade Union Law". "Labor disputes should be settled by factory committees

consisting of representatives from the management and workers". In cases of stalemate, they should apply to the Bureau of Social Affairs for mediation rather than resort to "arbitrary actions, either dismissal of workers by employers or strikes by workers". The city government officials also admonished the employers to improve their treatment of workers, allowing them to "sign a collective contract on breaks, wage rates, compensations for work accidents, and setting up worker schools". Qingdao's mayor Ma Fuxiang particularly expected the employers to "put yourselves in the workers' position" and to be considerate for the workers' "untold plight". 140

At the meeting with foremen on December 13, the city government officials laid more emphasis on the importance of foremen as intermediaries in alleviating labor-capital tensions. They reminded foremen of their inherent "interdependent relationship with workers". "You are from the workers and depend on them for your position as foremen". "When discovering minor mistakes with workers, you should first try to redress them in a timely fashion on your own and prevent them from expanding. In case of major incidents beyond

140 "Ma Fuxiang yaoji changshang daibiao zuotan hui" (Ma Fuxiang met with employers' representatives) (December 12 1929), (originally in Ma Fuxiang A Brief History of Worker Movement in Qingdao), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 187-190; Shenbao, December 16, 1929.
your ability to solve, you should report them to the Public Security Bureau or the Bureau of Social Affairs for solution rather than inform the employers (or the management). Otherwise, conflicts (between workers and the management) will arise". In order to win the respect of workers, foremen needed to be "mild", "polite" and "reasonable" in dealing with them and to avoid any unlawful conducts such as beating. The city government officials further warned foremen not to block the formation of trade unions according to the Trade Union Law. 141

Finally, the city government called a meeting of about 20,000 workers on December 16, 1929. Ma Fuxiang made a major speech, illustrating how he and other city officials were concerned with workers' interests and what he expected from workers. Ma identified himself as "the common people's mayor different from other bureaucrats" and claimed that he was "always thinking of how to relieve local people of their suffering". Particularly, Ma attributed to himself the end of lockout and restoration of production in the Japanese enterprises. In return, Ma suggested, workers should appreciate the efforts made by the city government under him. Ma Fuxiang pointed out the fact that because of the shortage

141 "Ma Fuxiang zhaoji gechang batou xunhua" (Ma Fuxiang met with foremen from various firms and give them admonitions) (December 13, 1929), (originally in Ma Fuxiang A Brief History of Worker Movement in Qingdao), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 190-194; Shenbao, December 16, 1929.
of arable land, Qingdao’s prosperity and workers’ livelihood lay in the development of commerce and industry, which in turn primarily depended upon foreign investment. So he urged workers to help create a favorable environment to attract more foreign investment by showing sympathy for employers and foremen. If they had grievances and difficulties, workers should express them through "normal" channels and appeal to the city government for redress rather than seek their own way. Any disturbance of social order or breaking of the law would not be allowed. \(^{142}\)

The above meetings and speeches made by the Qingdao government officials should not be simply discredited as cheating or hypocritical. Rather, they reveal the real concern of the local officials for maintenance of social harmony and order and, above all, some characteristics of the strategy used by the Nationalist regime in dealing with the labor movement. Such characteristics become pronounced when compared with the practices of the warlord regime. First, the Nationalist local officials were more inclined to solve labor disputes by persuasion (through dialogue) and appeals to law than by coercion and military means. Secondly, they attempted to set up some formal procedures and special institutions,

\(^{142}\) "Ma Fuxiang zhaoji liangwan gongren dahui" (Ma Fuxiang called a meeting of 20,000 workers) (December 16, 1929), in Qingdao dangshi zilia, vol. 3, pp. 194-197; Shenbao, December 16, 1929.
official (the Bureau of Social Affairs) or unofficial (factory committees) to deal with labor issues. Thirdly, the Nationalist regime formally recognized that workers were a distinct social group and had the right to form trade unions. In solving labor disputes, the local officials posed as neutral and tried to strike some balance between workers and management. Therefore, it may not be justifiable to say that the Nationalist regime simply represented the interests of the propertied class (capitalists or landlords) as the communists have always claimed. The point was that the Nationalists could not afford to completely forgo workers as a power basis.

Even though the Qingdao government officials, after the end of the 1929 strike, took great pains to forestall labor unrest specifically by institutionalizing trade unions, they apparently failed. The early 1930s witnessed recurrent and vibrant worker movements in Qingdao, beginning with the strike at the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) in 1930 and culminating in the massive "anti-Japanese" strike in 1936. As in the earlier period, the outbreak of strikes in the 1930s still had to do with the fragmentation of state power and, more important than ever, with workers’ nationalism.

3. Labor Movements in the Early 1930s

In this section, I will look at the strike in the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) and the rickshaw pullers’
strike and the labor unrest in Japanese enterprises in early 1930s, while leaving the discussion of the 1936 anti-Japanese strike to a separate chapter. My purpose is to illustrate how union activities were facilitated by political forces, particularly the Reorganization Faction.

The Strike at BAT in Qingdao: the Comeback of the Reorganization Faction

BAT’s branch in Qingdao was established in 1923. By 1930, it had 1,800 workers in its employ, ranking as the third largest branch of BAT in China. Like its Japanese counterparts, BAT was not exempted from labor movements. On March 6, 1930, a major strike occurred, lasting one month or so. The strike was directly stirred up and led by members of the underground Reorganization Faction in response to anti-Chiang Kai-shek military campaigns. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, Qingdao was once an important base of the Reorganization Faction, which got actively involved in organizing worker movements. Some leading figures of this faction such as Yan Haiping took BAT’s two factories in Qingdao as their main arena of activities. They were forced to go underground when the Nanjing government under Chiang took over Qingdao. Despite purges by the Chiang faction, members of the Reorganization Faction continued working among workers and controlled the two unions at BAT, waiting for an opportune moment to wrest power from the Nationalist Qingdao authorities. Such a moment came in early 1930 when the allied
forces of some Nationalist "new warlords", Yan Xishan, Feng Yuxiang and Li Zongren, were taking concerted military action against Chiang Kai-shek (the so-called Great Central Plain War). For the time being, the anti-Chiang forces got the upper hand and, under the guidance of Wang Jingwei, set up a Nationalist government in Beijing as a rival of that under Chiang in Nanjing. During the war, Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, came under the control of the anti-Chiang forces. In Qingdao, there was a change in the city leadership: Ge Jing’en, also a military man, replaced Ma Fuxiang as mayor.

Taking advantage of the military confrontation within the Nationalist regime and especially the weakening of the Chiang faction as well as the turnover in the leading personnel of Qingdao, members of the Reorganization Faction resurfaced from underground and joined the anti-Chiang campaign with the aim of seizing the city’s political power. On April 20, 1930, they made a public statement, denouncing Chiang Kai-shek and the Qingdao city authorities for committing a variety of "crimes" such as "selling out the nation", dictatorship, "destruction of popular organizations" and suppression of popular movements. They called on the Nationalists at Qingdao to

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143 Lu Weijun, Mínguó Shandóng shí (Shandong in the Republican era) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1995), pp. 373-376.
"eliminate Chiang Kai-shek and his government". Meanwhile, members of the Reorganization Faction went out to different urban districts, actively mobilizing workers for a citywide strike. As a first step of this general scheme, they instigated the labor unrest at BAT. By stressing the role of the Reorganization Faction, I do not mean that the worker movement at BAT simply resulted from the Faction's partisan agitation. As in other industrial enterprises, workers in the BAT had their own grievances, especially on the wage issue. Since 1927, BAT's management gradually reduced the frequency of wage increase for workers from four times to thrice and then to twice per year. In 1929, the wage rates were actually frozen. Therefore, workers found the call of the Reorganization Faction for a strike appealing.

The one-month labor unrest at the BAT took the forms of strike and slowdown alternately. In this process, the trade unions put forward seven demands, focussing on wage increase and trade union rights. Among them were reemployment of those trade union leaders who had lost their jobs for undertaking union activities; a daily increase of twenty cents in wage for

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144 "Qingdao Guomindang gaizu pai wengao" (A statement of Qingdao's Reorganization Faction), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 62-63.

145 "Qingdao shi zhengfu xingzheng baogao" (The administrative report of the Qingdao city government) (1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, p. 206.
all workers; pay for workers during public holidays; unions' approval for dismissal of workers; recruitment of new workers through the unions' introduction; and a monthly subsidy of 400 yuan as union fees by the management. 146

BAT's management proved uncompromising and not only turned down the unions' demands and refused to deal with the unions but also slighted the mediation by the Bureau of Social Affairs. The management repeatedly threatened to close down factories and to dismiss workers. This made Qingdao’s new mayor Ge Jingen complain that "even workers are receptive to mediation, but the management (in Qingdao) displayed no sign of accommodation". "There seems no possibility for further negotiations", for BAT’s management "stubbornly sticks to its prejudice". Therefore, Ge appealed to the Nanjing central government that the Finance Ministry directly negotiate with BAT headquarters in Shanghai or the latter dispatch representatives to Qingdao for negotiation. He also asked the Nanjing government to persuade BAT neither to close factories nor to fire workers before a solution was found. 147

146 The City Party Branch, "Daying yan gongsi nanbei erchang gongchao jingguo baogao" (Report on labor movements at the BAT's two branches) (April 21, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 272-275.

147 Ge Jingen, "A Telegram to the Executive Yuan, Finance Ministry, and Ministry of Industry and Commerce" (March 29, 1930); "A Telegram to Song Ziwen" (March 30, 1930), Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 269-270.
Compared to its Japanese counterparts, BAT had some advantages and unique techniques to counteract the worker movement. First, under the general policy of "ruling the Chinese by the Chinese", the company hired some senior Chinese compradors such as Shen Kunsan and Cao Yunxiang as special advisors and paid them high salaries ranging from 500 to 3,000 yuan monthly (ordinary Chinese clerks were only paid about 60 yuan monthly). These compradors usually came from influential bureaucratic family backgrounds and they themselves were well educated (Shen Kunsan was a returned student from Britain) and enjoyed wide personal connections with both the Chinese authorities and local social elite. One specific duty of these compradors was to facilitate BAT’s communication with Chinese officials and to find out "inside stories" within the Chinese government, particularly the latter’s tendencies in making labor policies. When labor disputes arose, these compradors were to negotiate, in the capacity of the company’s representatives, with Chinese officials. Because of their unique Chinese experience, these senior compradors proved effective in bargaining with Chinese

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Although the Japanese business people also adopted such a policy since 1925, they applied it only within their factories. When labor disputes arose, they still had to turn to Japanese Consul General and urged him to press Chinese authorities for concession. Such a practice often made the Japanese appear aggressive and provocative.
Furthermore, in case of serious labor unrest, it was the headquarters of BAT at Shanghai rather than individual branches that designed the tactics of dealing with workers or unions. Beside directly pressing local Chinese authorities, BAT headquarters often went directly to the Nationalist central government at Nanjing and pressed it to take tough action against labor movements.

In handling the labor disputes at its two factories in Qingdao, BAT fully exploited the above techniques. First, the senior comprador Shen Kunsan, on behalf of BAT, wrote to Song Ziwen, finance minister of the Nationalist Nanjing government, warning that the strike in Qingdao "has halted the collection of taxes". Song reported, in turn, to Chiang Kai-shek that "the tobacco industry is really a reliable source of a large amount of tax revenue" and therefore should not be disturbed by strikes. Desperately in need of money to finance his war with the allied forces of Yan Xishan, Feng Yuxiang and Li Zongren (the Great Central Plain War), Chiang Kai-shek could not afford to lose the revenue from BAT. He immediately ordered Qingdao's mayor Ge Jingen to "swiftly put an end to the worker strike and therefore to safeguard the source of

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149 Yingmei yan gongsi zaihua qiye ziliao huibian (Compilation of materials on the BAT's two branches in China) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), vol. 3, PP. 955, 967-969
taxes*. Moreover, the Shanghai headquarters of BAT sent Cao Yunxiang, another senior Chinese comprador serving as the company's labor advisor, to Qingdao to help solve the labor dispute there. A returned student from the United States and once the principal of the Qinghua School, Cao was known for his familiarity with labor problems. He came to Qingdao and informed BAT management about the Nanjing government's attitude toward the worker movement, advising the management to adopt a hard line.  

The Qingdao city authorities were put in a difficult position. On the one hand, the Nationalist central government was pressing for a quick solution of the standoff at BAT and, on the other, BAT management was "uncooperative"—refusing to make any important concessions. So Qingdao's mayor Ge Jingen chose to narrow workers' demands and just focused on the wage issue in the negotiation, suggesting an increase of 20 cents in workers' daily wages. After being turned down by BAT management, Ge went further to reduce the wage increase rate to ten cents and then to eight cents. BAT management still refused to accept. On March 30, it simultaneously announced a

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lockout and the dismissal of 60 workers. It turned out that workers were equally uncompromising. As a counterattack to the management, the trade unions at BAT raised six demands on March 31, including payment of wages for the second half of the month, payment of "five years' bonus", payment of "travel fees for returning to native places", compensation for workers' losses resulting from the "unjustifiable" lockout, pay for the two holidays (March 18 and March 29) and "guarantee for workers' livelihood by the city government". 

In the meantime, trade unions published "a letter to all fellow workers of the city", expressing the grievances of workers at BAT and restating their requests. On April 2, trade union representatives from BAT gathered to discuss how to deal with the lockout. They urged the city-level Reorganization Committee for Unions and the Bureau of Social Affairs to enforce the above six demands; they demanded that, in case of a short-term lockout, the management should accept workers' previous requests and pay workers during the lockout; if the lockout is a long-term one, it should be approved by the "highest" city authorities and workers should be given "three-month pay as discharge fees". 

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152 Shenbao, April 1, 1930.

153 The City Party Branch, "Daying yan gongsi nanbei erchang gongchao jingguo baogao" (Report on labor movements at the BAT's two branches) (April 21, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 272-275.
By announcing the lockout, BAT management simply intended to threaten the workers and force them back from their "excessive" demands rather than to really carry out the lockout, which would be harmful to the company's interests. Contrary to BAT's expectation, however, the workers showed no signs of retreat. In such circumstances, BAT management felt compelled to take the initiative to break the stalemate. On April 3, it contacted the city government and put forward the following two terms for resumption of work: (1) the company would give workers 20 cents as a bonus for each box of tobacco products (each worker would get five cents); and (2) the city government should ensure that the workers "conduct themselves properly" and "follow the rules", while the management revoke the decision to dismiss the 60 workers. Deeming these conditions acceptable and eager to disentangle itself from the dispute, the Qingdao city authorities (the city government and the City Party Branch--this time, they cooperated well with each other, largely due to the pressure from the Nationalist central government) responded immediately by calling a meeting of representatives from the city-level Trade Union Reorganization Commission and from the two trade unions at BAT and asked them to persuade workers to resume work on April 5.

On April 5, however, not one worker appeared at BAT's two

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154 Ibid.
factories. It turned out that the members of the Reorganization Faction, who controlled the two trade unions at BAT, were secretly instigating workers to persevere in their struggle. They even went further to stage demonstrations and parades at the city government building, only to be blocked and dispelled by police forces. Enraged by such blunt challenges, the city authorities took two steps. First, they issued a stern order to arrest the members of Reorganization Faction. Second, they dissolved the two trade unions at BAT on the grounds that they were manipulated by "reactionary elements" and misled workers as well as "disobeyed the leadership of the higher-level trade union (the city-level Reorganization Committee)". On April 12, work formally resumed at BAT. 155

The Rickshaw Pullers' Strike: Wrangling between the City Government and the City Party Branch

If the labor unrest at BAT helped illustrate how the Reorganization Faction used workers in challenging the Nationalist city authorities, the strike of rickshaw pullers

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155 "Guomindang Qingdao shi xunlianbu zhang Wu Rencang baogao Daying yan gongsi nanbei chang gongren bagong yaoqiu gaishan daiyu zhi zhongyang xunlian bu cheng" (Report from Wu Rencang, head of the Nationalist Qingdao Training Department, to the Nationalist Central Training Department on worker strikes for improving treatment at BAT's two branches) (April 21, 1930), in Zhonghua minguo shi dangan ziliao hui bian (Compilation of archival materials on the history of the Republic of China) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), v. 5, pt. 1, no. 3, pp. 385-388; Shenbao, April 13, 16, 1930.
during July 21-27, 1930 cast in stark relief the division between the city government and the City Party Branch. In Qingdao by 1930, there were 286 rickshaw owners with about 2,000 rickshaws and with their own "guild". Nearly half of these owners were Japanese. There were another 2,500 rickshaw pullers, who also had their own trade Union. Without their own vehicles, the pullers had to rent rickshaws from the rickshaw guild and pay the daily rental. The original rent was between 30 and 35 cents, accounting for one third or half of the total daily income of a puller. 156 In May 1930, with the approval of the city government, the rickshaw guild raised the rent to 40 cents and hence increased the pullers' burden. Meanwhile, rickshaw pullers began to be aware that their occupation was being threatened by the introduction of a modern transport system. In 1930, buses appeared in Qingdao and attracted more and more passengers. In the face of the competition from this new type of vehicle, the rickshaw pullers were helpless. They felt, however, they could do something to prevent the increase in rickshaw rent. The rickshaw pullers' trade union presented petitions to the City Party Branch, insisting that the rent remain 30 cents. It also urged the City Party Branch to make representations to the city government on the rent issue. 157

156 Shenbao, August 4, 1930.
157 "Qingdao shi zhengfu xingzheng baogao--chuli renli chefu bagong fengchao jingguo" (The administrative report of the
As far as the City Party Branch was concerned, the rickshaw pullers' opposition to the rent increase was not only a labor problem, but also a political one, particularly given the fluid political and military situations then. The Great Central Plain War between Chiang Kai-shek and the anti-Chiang Nationalist forces was still under way. Even though underground, the Reorganization Faction and Communists were always ready to exploit workers' grievances. If these political rivals took the initiative in instigating the rickshaw pullers for a major strike, the City Party Branch feared its social basis would be undermined and its power status threatened. To prevent this from happening, the Party Branch deemed it imperative to strike first and seize the leadership of the rickshaw pullers' movement. On the other hand, the Party Branch regarded the rickshaw rent dispute as a chance to challenge the city government's authority, alleging that it was the city government who approved the rent increase after "taking bribes from the rickshaw owners' guild". However, this did not mean that the City Party Branch would support any violent actions on the part of the rickshaw pullers. Rather, it preferred a "peaceful struggle". Under the encouragement of the Party Branch, the rickshaw pullers' trade union decided to stage a strike.

Qingdao City Government--on solving the rickshaw pullers' strike) (June 21--August 30, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp, 223-228.
The strike began on July 21, 1930 and about 1,000 rickshaw pullers participated, demanding restoration of the original rent rate, 30 cents. The City Party Branch responded by advising the strikers to proceed "peacefully and orderly", while the city government "ordered" them to return to work and wait for its decision. What the city government decided was to increase the rent to 38 cents, only two cents lower than approved earlier, but far from 30 cents as the pullers demanded. So the latter persisted in the strike and eventually went into violence by attacking buses and carts. Police forces intervened and arrested about 200 strikers including some leading members of the rickshaw pullers' union. 158

From the outset, the city government realized that behind the rickshaw pullers' strike was the city-level Reorganization Commission for Qingdao Unions or the City Party Branch and that the strike could not be easily pacified without first neutralizing its backers. However, the city government was not in a position to dictate to the City Party Branch, for they were, after all, at the same rank. Therefore, Mayor Ge Jing'en turned to the Nanjing Nationalist government for direction. He was instructed to take strict measures and to settle the

158 Shenbao, July 25, 28, 1930; The CCP Qingdao Committee, "Qingdao qiyue jian sanci douzheng qingxing" (Three struggles at Qingdao in July), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 157-160.
unrest properly and quickly. 159 With the authority from the central government, Ge Jing’en and the city government under him no longer took the City Party Branch seriously. On July 26, when 81 members of the rickshaw pullers’ trade union were holding a meeting on the strike at the Party Branch’s auditorium, Ge Jing’en requested that the Party Branch "hand over" the "trouble-making" union members. After being turned down, Ge ordered the Public Security Bureau to take tough action. The latter dispatched military police forces to the City Party Branch, taking away all 81 union members by force. 160

What ensued were quarrels between the city government and the City Party Branch over who was to blame for the above violent episode. The Party Branch published some photographs in the newspapers under its control, showing its office in a great mess and the furnishings in the office being damaged, and suggested that these were caused by the military police. Meanwhile, the City Party Branch lodged a complaint against the city government with the Nanjing Nationalist government. It first accused the city government of "taking bribes" from the rickshaw owners, "increasing the rickshaw rent by one

159 "Ge Jing’en’s Telegram to the President of the Nationalist Government and Head of the Executive Yuan" (July 22, 1930); "Telegram to Ge Jingen from the Office of Civil Officials of the Nationalist Government", in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, p. 278.

160 Shenbao, July 27, 29, 1930.
third", "being blindly partial to the capitalists", and "illegally disbanding the rickshaw pullers' union". Then, the City Party Branch enumerated the "atrocities" committed by the military police sent by the city government: surrounding and forcing into the Party Branch's office, randomly arresting and insulting the people inside and even detaining party leaders, and destroying documents. The Party Branch particularly targeted Mayor Ge Jing'en, "All these were designed by Ge Jing'en", who "trampled upon laborers" and "devastated the Party affairs" and therefore deserved harsh punishment. 161

On his part, Ge Jing'en sent one secret telegram after another to the Nanjing Nationalist government, taking pains to clear himself and the city government of the charges laid by the City Party Branch. He claimed that the military police, instead of getting into the Party Branch's auditorium or office, only carried out their duty outside. As to the so-called evidence (the photographs), it was purely fabricated by the Party Branch. It was the latter who messed up its office and then took pictures of it, intending to shift the blame onto the city government. "Taking advantage of its own newspapers", the Party Branch simply "confounded right with wrong and defiled the (city) government". Ge Jing'en went

161 "A Telegram by the Qingdao Nationalist Party Branch to the Nationalist Central Department and Commander-in-Chief (Chiang Kai-shek) (July 26, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 279-280."
further to accuse the City Party Branch for "privately gathering the rickshaw pullers and instigating labor unrest".

The Nanjing central government did not bother making a thorough investigation of the dispute between the Qingdao city government and City Party Branch. What it was concerned about was that the rickshaw pullers’ strike be contained. Therefore, it approved the above suppressive measures taken by Mayor Ge Jing'en and agreed with Ge's further decision that the newspapers under the City Party Branch be suspended temporarily. The Nanjing government also transferred some leaders of the Qingdao's Party Branch to Nanjing to "accept instruction and admonition". Meanwhile, all members of the city-level Reorganization Committee for Unions resigned for "mishandling" the labor unrest. With the City Party Branch weakened and Reorganization Committee reshuffled, the rickshaw pullers and their union lost a sympathizer or a backer, and soon resumed work under the pressure from the increasingly

162 "A Telegram by Ge Jingen to the President of the Nationalist Government and the Head of the Executive Yuan" (July 26, 1930); "A Telegram by Ge Jingen to the President of the Nationalist Government, the Head of the Executive Yuan and the Central Party Department" (July 28, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 279, 281.

163 Shenbao, July 29, 1930; "A Letter from the Office of Civil Officials of the Nationalist Government to the Secretariat of the Central Party Department"; "A Telegram from the Office of Civil Officials of the Nationalist Government to Ge Jingen", in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, p. 280.
intolerant city government.

The Contest between "Lawful Trade Unions" and "Scab Unions" in Japanese Cotton Mills

Japanese enterprises always proved to be a fertile soil for labor movements despite the harsh measures of control taken by the Japanese employers. As suggested in the previous discussion, a key issue that often immediately triggered the labor-capital confrontation in Japanese enterprises was the legitimacy of trade unions. In the wake of the 1929, this problem seemed to have been solved, for the Japanese accepted that workers had the right to organize trade unions in their enterprises according to law and they also promised to provide subsidies to unions. However, the Japanese employers' suspicion and abhorrence of Chinese trade unions by no means diminished. From their point of view, these unions were nothing but adversaries of Japanese management and they could be used not only by workers in bargaining for their own benefits, but also could be capitalized on by Chinese bureaucrats to interfere with the Japanese businesses. Therefore, the Japanese still took it as a priority to neutralize trade unions. Unable to forestall the formation of trade unions at their enterprises inasmuch as it was within the Chinese law, they attempted to offset their influence, or subvert and change them into an instrument of their own.

The major technique the Japanese employers used to
sabotage trade unions was "divide and rule", namely, sowing discord among workers or capitalizing on existing divisions among them, and playing one group off against another. Among the Chinese workers in Qingdao's Japanese cotton mills, there was the division between two major groups based on native places: "westerners" (xifu ren) and "locals". The former were the workers from areas to the far west of Qingdao centered in Wei County; the latter consisted of those who came from the nearby areas centered in the county of Jimo. The two groups often ran into competition or conflict with each other for control of enterprise-level trade unions. Such a contradiction was well exploited by the Japanese employers. More often than not, they bought over Chinese workers and abetted them to covertly sabotage the officially-sanctioned trade unions in their factories. In the Dakang Cotton Mill, for example, the Japanese management sponsored a secret sworn society among the workers from Jimo county ("the locals"), who were at odds with the trade union's leading members mostly from around Wei County ("the westerners"). As a reward for the society's anti-trade union activities, the management promised its members guaranteed employment. The technique exacerbated disputes and infighting among workers. More than once, such factional disputes evolved into violent confrontations and therefore incurred the intervention from both the city government (the Public Security Bureau and the Bureau of Social Affairs) and
the City Party Branch. The latter blamed the "locals" for organizing an "illegal organization (the sworn society), "sowing dissension among workers" and "destroying worker movement". Therefore, the Party Branch requested that they be arrested and severely punished" by the Public Security Bureau. On the other hand, it came to the conclusion that the trade union at the Dakang Cotton Mill was inefficient in handling the contradictions among workers and therefore should be suspended temporarily. 164

In another Japanese cotton mill, Zhongyuan, the management adopted a similar technique as that used in Dakang in dealing with the "lawful" trade union. This union was formed and controlled by the workers that could be identified as "locals". It gained its legitimacy simply by registering with the city-level Reorganization Committee for Unions and by claiming to accept the leadership of the City Party Branch. This officially-sanctioned trade union exerted great influence among workers mainly because of its campaigning for workers' interests. In the Japanese management's eye, the union was nothing but a source of troubles. To counterbalance it, the

164 "Qingdao tebie shi dangwu zhidaowei yuhanhui fu Guomingdang zhongyang xunlian bu" (Qingdao Party Affairs Direction Committee's report to GMD Central Training Department) (October 22, 1930); "Dakang shachang bangpai jiufen de biaoyu" (Slogans concerning factional disputes at the Dakang Cotton Mill), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 284-287; pp. 263-264.
Japanese management bought over a certain Wang Jingxian, who was a "westerner", and supported him to form a trade union among his fellow "westerners" in June 1930. The Japanese showered this westerners' union with favors, particularly giving its leading members each a quality woolen suit and boots, to be easily distinguished from others. With the favor and confidence from the Japanese, these people suddenly became, understandably, overweening and arrogant, but at the same time incurred contempt (or jealousy) and mockery from other workers, who dubbed the westerners' union as a "mapi union" (a union that followed the Japanese as the skin adhered to a horse's body). Under the Japanese manager's encouragement, the westerners' union attempted to eliminate the locals' union by force. The locals, however, showed no signs of cowardliness and were ready to meet the challenge. They planned to take the initiative by attacking the westerners' union and staging a strike simultaneously. The fear for possible massive damages to the factory by the imminent violence of workers compelled the management to immediately report to the Public Security Bureau on "workers' riots". Being already upset by the news that the anti-Chiang allied forces were marching victoriously towards Shandong, the Qingdao Nationalist authorities did not want to see further troubles rise in its own territory. Without making further investigation, the Public Security Bureau hurried police
forces to the Zhongyuan Cotton Mill, who, under the guide of westerners' union, arrested about 20 members of the locals' union including seven suspected members of the Reorganization Faction. Meanwhile, the city-level Reorganization Committee for Unions was forced to dissolve the "legitimate" locals' trade union on June 15, 1930. Therefore, the Japanese-backed westerners' union became the only trade union at the Zhongyuan Cotton Mill and it existed till April 1931. 

Another technique the Japanese employers exploited in dealing with trade unions was to hire independent Japanese agents (lang ren, ronin in Japanese) in Qingdao to terrorize workers and especially trade union members with violence. For example, on June 4, 1930, upon the call of the Japanese management of the Zhongyuan Cotton Mill, 31 of such agents (members of the Japanese Society of National Essence at Qingdao) came to the mill by five cars. In green uniform and with black sticks in hand, they wandered and inquired at the factory premises, apparently intending to put on a show of force and to give workers a warning. The use of independent

165 Li Yin and Gong Yuzao (eds), Zhonggong Qingdao dangshi (Qingdao's party history) (Qingdao: Qingdao chubanshe, 1990), pp. 100-101; "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu Zhongyuan shachang douzheng qingkuang de baogao" (CCP Shandong Committee's report on workers' struggle at Zhongyuan Cotton Mill), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 150-153.

166 "Qingdao gongan ju shangbao gongchao qingkuang" (Qingdao Public Security Bureaus's report on labor unrest) (1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 239-240.
agents was also intended to scare the Chinese city officials, who were particularly afraid of violent conflicts between the Chinese and foreign residents.

**Modification of the Nationalist State Policy toward Trade Unions**

The above discussion shows that foreign capitalists and particularly the Japanese business people in Qingdao were hostile to union activities in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Such hostility was doubtless rooted in their instinctive fear and distaste for worker solidarity. It may also be accounted for by the trade unions' unusual militancy, partly resulting from the agitation of rival political forces such as the Reorganization Faction and from the sponsorship of segments of the state power such as the Nationalist City Party Branch. The internal struggles of the local state authorities particularly rendered the state control of trade unions ineffective, regardless of the persistent complaints and pressures from foreign business people and their government agents in Qingdao.

The central government in Nanjing regarded the complaints from foreign businessmen as a serious matter. Above all, the regime relied on foreign businesses as a major source of revenue. For example, in Qingdao alone, its monthly revenue from the taxes on tobacco products of BATC (the British
American Tobacco Company) amounted to about 100,000 Chinese dollars (yuan). The Nanjing regime desperately needed such revenue particularly to finance its campaigns against rival Nationalist forces and the Red Army in the early 1930s. Furthermore, the regime deemed foreign businesses indispensable to solve unemployment. In Qingdao, the Japanese almost monopolized the cotton textile industry, the backbone of the city's economy, hiring more than 20,000 Chinese workers. Social stability would be at stake if workers' movements led to the shutdown of Japanese factories and hence large-scale unemployment. In addition, the Nanjing regime, preoccupied with the civil wars with the Communists, tried to avoid any direct military confrontation with foreign powers. Particularly, it feared that workers' movements in Japanese factories would incur interference from the Japanese naval forces stationed in the Qingdao harbour.

At least partly out of such consideration of foreign pressures, the Nanjing Nationalist regime took a tough stand toward the workers' movement and specifically trade unions in 1930. It ordered a reshuffle of the "left-oriented" Qingdao Party Branch and shifted its responsibility for the trade

union work to the Bureau of Social Affairs under the "right-oriented" Qingdao government. Moreover, the regime abolished the radical city-level Reorganization Commission for Unions; it ordered that trade unions be reorganized on the basis of industries (one industry usually consisted of many enterprises) rather than enterprises and that the enterprise-level trade unions including those in the Japanese cotton mills be disbanded. Given that the textile industry was the largest industry in Qingdao and involved too many enterprises in different urban districts, three trade unions were allowed in this sector, each working with several enterprises in one urban district. For example, the Cangkou Textile Trade Union worked with four cotton mills in Cangkou district: Japanese-owned Zhongyuan, Fuji, Baolai and Chinese-owned Huaxin; the Sifang Textile Trade Union were concerned with the three Japanese cotton mills in Sifang district: Dakang, Naigai Wata Kaisha and Longxing; the Dongzhen Textile Trade Union were related to Japanese-owned Lingmu Silk Mill, Dalong Carpet Factory and others in Dongzhen district. As a result of such reorganization, the Nationalist state-sanctioned trade unions were reduced significantly in number, from 47 in 1930 to 16 during 1931-1934. 168 In the meantime, the Nanjing regime

168 "Trade Unions in Qingdao" (April 1930-September 1930); "Reorganization of Trade Unions in Various Industries (Sectors)" (1931-1934), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 77-80, 81-82.
attempted to modify the radical nature of trade unions by reemphasizing their role in the mediation of labour disputes and promotion of labour-capital cooperation. It prescribed that workers were not allowed to engage in "activities disturbing order such as slowdowns" or to "hold meetings without approval from the above" and that grassroots unions should first express workers' grievances or requests to city authorities rather than deal directly with management. 169 On April 10, 1934, Chiang Kai-shek issued another order that "during the period of national calamity" (caused by the Japanese invasion), local officials must try their best to prevent strikes and slowdowns from happening and to disband any trade unions involved in labor activism. 170 Following Chiang's order, Qingdao's new mayor Shen Honglie outlawed all the "official-sanctioned" trade unions in the city. Shen was particularly concerned to avoid protests or intervention from the Japanese Consul General at Qingdao. 171

169
"GMD Central Committee Training Department's Report to GMD Central Executive Committee on Temporarily Suspending Union Activities in Qingdao" (May 20, 1930); "A Letter from the GMD Central Executive Committee" (April 25, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 64-66.

170
Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 3, pp. 1185-1186.

171
Qingdao gongren yundong shi (A history of Qingdao’s labor movement) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989), p. 205.
These measures suggested that Nationalist state power was retreating from interfering with foreign enterprises under the latter's pressure. Its withdrawal left room for relatively autonomous, non-official trade unions to operate. It seems ironical that foreign capitalists were able to force the state power out of their enterprises, but could not prevent workers from forming their own independent or semi-independent trade unions. This was partly because the state power as embodied in official trade unions was too visible and therefore could be easily identified by foreign employers as their targets.

Foreign capitalists, accustomed to free business, were not ready to accept political intervention. Unlike their rigid and ostentatious official counterparts, non-official trade unions had more cards to play and more room to manoeuvre. They were particularly flexible. To circumvent opposition from foreign employers, they could take on the traditional appearance of mutual-aid society, welfare society, brotherhood or sisterhood society, native-place association, martial arts society and young Christians' association. Although they did not take the name of trade union, these organizations actually played the role of trade unions, bargaining with employers and championing workers' interests. 172 Foreign employers had to

rack their brains to find ways of dealing with these camouflaged trade unions.

More importantly, non-official trade unions could exploit nationalism to their own advantage without worrying about its diplomatic ramifications. This was what happened in Qingdao in the 1930s, when the Japanese invaded and occupied China. 173 During this period, anti-Japanese nationalism was apparently a strong force working among workers in Qingdao. 174 The nationalist Qingdao authorities recognized that "since the Liaoning Incident (September 18, 1931), the "labour-capital relationship in the Japanese factories has been worrying" and that it was "deeply afraid of workers' stirring up troubles".

173 In this respect, Johnson's study is inspiring. He examines well how the Japanese invasion and atrocities helped mobilize peasants in North China and gave rise to the "peasant nationalism". See Chalmers A. Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

174 Shandong had long been Japan's sphere of influence. The Japanese military forces committed Jinan Massacre in 1928, killing hundreds of innocent urban residents. In 1932, the Japanese naval forces landed in Qingdao and supported the Japanese residents in surrounding and setting fire on the buildings of the GMT City Party Branch and of a Chinese newspaper. Shandong also indirectly felt the Japanese threat. Since September 18, 1931, most of the fighters of the anti-Japanese forces in Manchuria were immigrants from Shandong. Qingdao's workers, largely form other parts of Shandong, must have been well aware of the Japanese as foreign invaders. See, "Shandong sheng wei guanyu riben diguozhuyi jingong huabei de jueyi" ("Resolution of the Shandong Provincial Party Committee (CCP) on the Japanese Invasion of North China") (1933), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 481-485; Shenbao, January 14 and 15, 1932; Shenbao, January 13, 15, 16, 18, 1932.
In 1936, the Qingdao Textile Workers’ Association wrote to generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng, expressing their support for the two generals’ anti-Japanese stance in kidnapping and forcing Chiang Kai-shek to agree to resist the Japanese invasion in the Xian Incident. Nationalism served trade unions well as a means to mobilize workers and expand their influence. For example, the Qingdao Carters’ Trade Union blamed the Japanese for their miseries and called on workers to join them in "struggling" against the "Japanese robbers" and capitalists and in defending workers’ interests. In November and December of 1936, echoing the 30,000-worker strike in Shanghai Japanese cotton mills, 24,000 workers in ten Japanese textile factories in Qingdao launched a strike, which lasted about one month. The Japanese secret agency detected that the strike was politically motivated and instigated by Communists, nationalist city officials in charge

175 "Qingdao shi zhengfu xingzheng baogao" (The Qingdao government’s administrative report) Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 438-440.

176 Shilun (Wheels of the Times), no. 7, December 31, 1936.

177 "Qingdao dachefu douzheng gangling" (Qingdao Carters’ struggle programs) and "Qingdao dache gongren gonghui jianzhang" (The charter of Qingdao carters’ trade union) (1935), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 536-539.

178 I will provide a detailed description of this strike in Chapter 6.
of labour affairs, and workers' societies. However, the history of the CCP in Qingdao suggests that Communists did not get involved in organizing the strike. Instead, underground trade unions were behind it. The then Qingdao mayor also admitted that some nationalists attempted to solicit the support of trade unions as political capital in the Nationalist Assembly election. Obviously, trade unions were the major force behind the strike. In Shanghai, riding the wave of nationalistic movements against the Japanese, workers organized various kinds of national-salvation societies or associations (e.g., Shanghai Women's National-Salvation Society, Workers' National-Salvation Society in Japanese Cotton Mills, Workers' National-Salvation Society in Meiya Silk Mill, Workers' National-salvation Society of Shanghai, to just name a few) and called for strikes in Japanese and not in Chinese factories.

Nationalism was also a weapon for trade unions to frustrate the efforts of foreign, especially Japanese employers to sabotage trade unions by manipulating workers. Those workers who assisted Japanese employers could be easily discredited as notorious Chinese traitors (hanjian). Without

179 Sun Bingyue (ed), Shetuan zhi, p. 5; Qingdao dangshi ziliao, pp. 568-573.
Chinese collaboration, the Japanese were not able to penetrate workers' secret organizations. Partly succumbing to such nationalistic outcry, the Nationalist local authorities had to tolerate those voluntary worker organizations which claimed to aim at "saving the Chinese nation". In addition, local authorities may have needed trade unions to check foreign capitalists and to mediate labour-capital disputes in foreign enterprises, where state power failed to penetrate.

To further illustrate the role of nationalism in mobilizing workers and reviving union activities, I turn to the 1936 anti-Japanese strikes in both Shanghai and Qingdao.
Chapter 6 The 1936 anti-Japanese Strikes

On November 8 and 19, 1936, two massive strikes occurred successively in Japanese enterprises (mainly cotton mills) at Shanghai and Qingdao. The strike in Shanghai lasted nineteen days from November 8 to 27 and the Qingdao strike nearly a month from November 19 to December 14. Together, they involved about 84,000 Chinese workers in more than forty Japanese enterprises. Although different forces (Communists and the Nationalist-led General Trade Union in Shanghai, various worker societies, and some Nationalist city officials in Qingdao) worked behind the strikes and had their own specific concerns, they seemed to have shared one thing: anti-Japanese nationalism, which was awakened or reinforced by the persistent Japanese invasion in the first half of the 1930s. This nationalism accelerated the 1936 strikes and helped cement the unity of workers, especially among their organizers. Anti-Japanese nationalism was intertwined with workers’ desire to improve their own economic conditions. The workers could not miss the fact that their employers and the foreign aggressors were identical in nationality (Japanese) and that anti-Japanese strikes could serve their (workers’) immediate economic interests. Furthermore, like previous labor movements, the 1936 strikes, especially the strike in Shanghai, were under strong influence from political forces (Communists and nationalists) and local elite (e.g., Du
Yuesheng). The strike in Shanghai was actually organized and led by both Communists and the Nationalist state-sanctioned Shanghai General Trade Union. There is no doubt that these forces intended to garner political capital and to assert their own authority among workers. In this sense, they were taking advantage of the national crises and exploiting the worker movement for their own political interests. To do so successfully, however, they also had to consider workers' interests. Therefore, the involvement of political forces in labor movement had to benefit workers.

1. The Strike at Shanghai

The CCP Work Committee at Japanese Cotton Mills and the Nationalist-led Shanghai General Trade Union

Two political organizations played a leading role in the strike in Shanghai: the Communist-led Work Committee at Japanese Cotton Mills and the Nationalist-led Shanghai General Trade Union. If the former worked behind the scenes, instigating the workers for strike, the latter functioned openly, adding fuel to the strike. They seemed to have reached some tacit understanding in facilitating the worker movement against a common enemy: the Japanese.

The Work Committee at Japanese Cotton Mills was formed by underground communists in February 1936 in the tide of
widespread anti-Japanese national-salvation movement. Its leading members included Zhang Weizhen, Han Nianlong, Zhou Lin, Chen Zhiyi and Guo Guangzhou. On November 6, 1936, the Work Committee held a meeting and decided to stage a major strike in Japanese cotton mills. It also laid down the following guidelines for the strike. First, the strike should be completely limited within Japanese enterprises rather than extended to Chinese ones in order to win the sympathy of Chinese capitalists. Second, the strike must be concerned with workers' immediate economic interests. Given that strikes in Japanese enterprises carried the political meaning of anti-Japanese imperialism, there was no need to openly raise anti-Japanese political slogans, which would provoke blunt suppression from the Japanese. In addition, the Work Committee planned to initiate the strike in eastern Shanghai and then expanded it to western Shanghai. After the meeting, members of the "Work Committee in Japanese Cotton Mills" went separately to mobilize workers. Indeed, the underground Communists did take initiative in stirring up the strike and, to a large extent, contribute to its eventual success. However, the CCP

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181 I will give more detailed description about the relationship between the CCP and labor movement in Chapter 7.

was not the only political player in the strike. Any fair
treatment of this large-scale labor movement must also
consider the role of the Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU).

The history of the SGTU can be traced back to December
1931, although it only gained its legitimate status as late
as January 1935. Here it may be useful to provide some
detailed information about how the SGTU came into existence as
an "illegal" organization and how it then gradually became a
lawful one. In the introduction to Part II of this
dissertation, I mentioned that the Nationalist regime, in May
1928, set up a citywide labor institution, the Reorganization
Committee for Shanghai Unions. It only existed for five months
and was dissolved in October 1928 because of its inability to
supervise the labor movement, which partly derived from the
chronic factional struggles within it. Then, in July 1929, the
Shanghai City Party Branch approved the formation of the
Preparatory Committee for Shanghai General Trade Union.
However, this city-level union was also short-lived and ceased
to function in July 1930, for its existence was regarded as
contradicting the Trade Union Law promulgated in October 1929,
which did not provide for the formation of city-level general
trade unions. 183 According to the law, trade unions should be
based on industries or occupations rather than administrative

183 Wang Yongxi, Zhongguo gonghui shi, p. 217; Ma Chaojun et al,
Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, pp. 921, 986.
territories. Thus, during most of the Nanjing era, there were no "legitimate" general trade unions at county, city and national levels that could represent various unions in different industries or occupations. As for why the Nationalist regime outlawed such organizations, there were no official explanations. Perhaps the regime intended to keep trade unions divided so that it could forestall the rise of a unified general trade union as a potentially powerful political rival. The regime may also have been worried that a general trade union at any level would be a new arena for power struggles between different factions within the regime and that such struggles would render the general trade union ineffective in controlling the labor movement and therefore meaningless as a state instrument, as was testified in the case of the Unification Committee for Shanghai Union Organization and Reorganization Committee for Shanghai Unions.

Despite the legal restraint from the Nationalist regime, people with interest in the labor movement in Shanghai (Nationalist officials in charge of labor affairs and union leaders at some major industries and enterprises) made great efforts to set up a citywide general trade union, especially since the "September Eighteenth Incident" of 1931. They insisted that a Shanghai general trade union was necessary to secure labor unity in the resistance movement against the Japanese invasion. After their repeated appeal on this issue
was turned down by the Nationalist central government at Nanjing, leading figures of "labor circles" (gongjie) decided to go their own way. On December 19, 1931, representatives from over sixty trade unions gathered at the headquarters of the Postal Trade Union and proclaimed the Shanghai General Trade Union. On the same day, other trade unions in Shanghai held a meeting at the office of the Chinese Electric Union and formed a similar general trade union. On December 31, the two merged into a single body: the Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU). Among its principal leaders were Zhou Xuexiang and Zhu Xuefan. 184

The formation of the SGTU was illegitimate in the sense that it neither had legal basis nor obtained prior approval from the Nationalist authorities. In the next few years (from December 1931 to January 1935,) the SGTU had to fight hard for its legitimacy. The attitude of the Nationalist regime towards the SGTU seemed ambiguous. While it did not ban the organization, it also refused to grant it legal status. Whenever the SGTU demanded official recognition or legitimacy, both local and central authorities usually responded that they were unable to acknowledge it because of the limitation of the existing trade union law. They suggested that if there was any need for unifying workers to engage in the anti-Japanese

national-salvation movement, the Shanghai General Trade Union could change its name into the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions for National-Salvation. Apparently, the Nationalist regime was quite sensitive to the SGTU as a unified organization with primary interest in labor movements and it attempted to divert the SGTU's orientation from labor issues to foreign invasion and thus to reshape its nature and limit its scope of activities. Such an attitude of the Nationalist regime only provoked strong protest from the SGTU. On January 24, 1934, the SGTU and about fifty other industry- and enterprise-level trade unions submitted a petition to the Fourth Plenum of the Fourth GMD Central Committee, urging it to immediately revise the Trade Union Law and to legitimize city- and provincial-level general trade unions. They argued that such trade unions were needed not only for resisting the Japanese, but also for reviving the labor movement, which had been at a low ebb due to the lack of unified leadership. As for the legal restraint, it could be removed simply by revising the Trade Union Law and adapting to the changing circumstances. They further questioned: if other city-level popular organizations such as the City Peasant Association, the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Student Associations could be guaranteed by legislation, why should the Shanghai General Trade Union be exceptional, that is, be

deprived of legal protection? The SGTU finally succeeded in gaining legitimate status in January 1934, when the Nationalist Central Committee agreed to revise the Regulation on Popular Organizations and to allow for the formation of general trade unions at county and city levels. 186

The Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU) may be put into the category of "yellow unions" in terms of its official connections. First, it was sanctioned by the Nationalist authorities and had to accept the latter's direction. Secondly, most of the SGTU's leaders were GMD members and many of them were members from the Shanghai City Party Branch. Its ultimate goal was to cooperate with the party and government in consolidating the rule of the Nationalist regime rather than to seek full independence. However, the SGTU did have its own interests. The persistent efforts of the SGTU for legitimate status indicated that its leaders were a distinct interest group within the GMD, seeking to gain political influence by exploiting the labor movement. Being aware that its legitimacy not only derived from the official recognition, but also depended upon the workers' support, the SGTU became actively involved in improving workers' conditions and in labor movements. In the mid-1930s, many workers lost their

186 "Shanghai wushi yu gonghui qing sizhong quanhui jueyi xiugai gonghuifa" (A petition from over fifty Shanghai unions to the Fourth Plenum on revision of trade union law), in Ma Chaojun et al, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 1186-1187; 1203-1204.
jobs due to the slack condition of some Chinese-owned businesses, which resulted partly from the impact of the Sino-Japanese conflict. The Shanghai General Trade Union, on the one hand, repeatedly appealed to the Shanghai city government to provide relief to unemployed workers and to help them get reemployed. On the other, it made some specific efforts on its own to create employment opportunities for workers. For example, in September 1935, the SGTU set up the so-called Chinese Goods Promotion Society (quohuo tuixiao tuan), specially recruiting unemployed workers as salesmen. The SGTU bought goods directly from Chinese factories at wholesale prices and then let workers sell them at market prices. Workers could get some income from the price differentials. Moreover, the SGTU strongly appealed to the Nationalist central government to enforce the Factory Inspection Law in the foreign-controlled concessions so that the "workers' living conditions could be improved", "public sanitation and social welfare" guaranteed, and work accidents reduced or prevented. 187

Moreover, like its Communist rivals, the Shanghai General Trade Union also paid enormous attention to the mobilization of workers in Japanese cotton mills. Given that it was usually difficult to openly organize trade unions in Japanese

enterprises because of the strong opposition from the Japanese employers, the SGTU first set up a School for Workers' Children and used it as a link to workers to cultivate their confidence. Members of the SGTU went further to unite workers in the form of sworn brotherhoods especially for dealing with Japanese foremen. Then, they divided these workers into various groups, small, medium-sized and large, with liaison men transmitting messages between them. The SGTU also set up such seemingly innocuous organizations as workers' welfare societies in foreign enterprises. In mobilizing workers and hence expanding its own influence, the SGTU seems to have benefitted by the Japanese invasion of China and the anti-Japanese feelings of Chinese workers. Taking advantage of such feelings, the SGTU organized a semi-overt worker society in 1935, the so-called Braves' Brigade (yongjin dui). Outwardly, the Brigade claimed to be formed by the SGTU's president Zhu Xuefan and under his personal leadership rather than under the SGTU as an officially-sanctioned organization in order to avoid possible interference from the Shanghai City Party Branch, which in turn feared Japanese protest. The Braves' Brigade was intended for resistance against further Japanese invasion or occupation of Shanghai, which was well anticipated by the SGTU leadership. For this purpose, the Brigade's members undertook military exercise, political study, and
anti-Japanese propaganda. Such activities on the part of the Shanghai General Trade Union contributed significantly to the mobilization of workers and prepared them for participation in the massive 1936 strike.

The Process of the 1936 Strike

The strike started in eastern Shanghai’s seven Japanese cotton mills on November 8, 1936, upon the direct call from the Communist Work Committee at the Japanese Cotton Mills. The number of strikers amounted to about 15,000. In their name, the clandestine Worker Committee issued a statement, outlining five demands: (1) a wage increase by 10%; (2) a one-hour break for meal; (3) no dismissal of workers; (4) no beating of workers; and (5) no extra work hours on Sunday. The Japanese employers (headed by Funatsu Tatsuichiro, the director-general of the Federation of Japanese Cotton Mill Owners’ Associations), on the one hand, called in Japanese marines to safeguard their factories and, on the other, repeatedly gathered to discuss how to deal with the strike. Initially (on November 9), Funatsu refused to consider workers’ demands on the grounds that these demands were not presented formally, but only contained in such propaganda materials as handbills.

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Then (on November 12), he and other Japanese cotton mill owners suggested that they could only increase workers' wages by five per cent, while rejecting all the other four demands of the striking workers. From November 17, the strike began to spread to western Shanghai's Japanese cotton mills, increasing the number of striking workers to over 60,000.

To this Communist-incited strike, the Nationalist-affiliated Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU) responded positively. On November 11, it ordered members of the Braves' Brigade in Japanese cotton mills to join in the strike and particularly to mobilize workers to petition the city government. Moreover, the SGTU sent representatives to express sympathy and solicitude to the strikers and give them coupons for buying rice. Taking advantage of personal connections with some major newspapers, it disseminated news on the strike to evoke public attention and support. In addition, the SGTU even directly contacted worker representatives and offered to lead the strike. The communist-led Work Committee did not reject such an overture. Instead, it instructed the worker representatives to show willingness to accept the SGTU's

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189 Ma Zhongyue, "Shanghai fanri da bagong shiji" (A chronological record of Shanghai's anti-Japanese strike), in *Shanghai fanri da bagong*, pp. 53-69.

190 Zhu Xuefan, op cit., "Kangri minzu tongyi zhanxian yu Shanghai shachang gongren fanri da bagong".
guidance. Of course, the Work Committee only attempted to use the "legitimate" SGTU as a shield against official suppression of the strike rather than really concede the strike leadership to its rival, the SGTU. On November 18, an open leading organ for the strike, the Strikers' Delegation, was formed, with Zhu Yingkang as its head. Zhu was a worker activist from the Toyoda cotton mill in western Shanghai, where the strike started, maintaining close relations with both the Communist-led Work Committee and the Nationalist-sanctioned SGTU. While preparing for the strike in western Shanghai, Zhu was arrested by the police on November 16 and two days later was bailed out by Zhu Xuefan, the SGTU president. Thus, Zhu Yingkang seemed to be a man acceptable to both the Work Committee and the SGTU. The Strikers' Delegation under his name may have been result of compromise between the Communists and the Nationalist-sanctioned SGTU. The former, while considering it expedient to work together with the SGTU, did not want the SGTU really to take the leadership over the strike. With a person like Zhu Yingkang as the head of the strike's leading organ, the Communists felt they could easily dictate the procedure of the strike and make their influence felt among workers without inviting brutal crackdown.

The strike in the Japanese cotton mills also had

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Zhang Weizhen, "Huiyi Shanghai fanri da bagong de yixie qingkuang", in Shanghai fanri da bagong, pp. 1-17.
repercussions among people from other walks of life. On November 12, various social organizations such as the Shanghai Federation of All Circles for National-Salvation (Shanghai gejie jiuguo lianhehui, formed on January 28, 1936), the Shanghai Women’s Society for National-Salvation (Shanghai funu jie jiuguohui, formed on December 21, 1935) and the Shanghai Society of Cultural Circles for National-Salvation (Shanghai wenhua jie jiuguohui, formed on December 27, 1935), the Young Women’s Christian Society (Jidujiao nu jingnian hui), and the Educational Society concerning National Calamities (guonan jiaoyu she) held a meeting in the name of celebrating Sun Yat-sen’s birthday and expressed their support for the strike. They passed a resolution on establishing a special committee for supporting the strike in Japanese cotton mills and made donations for the strikers. On November 15, the Shanghai Federation of All Circles for National-Salvation issued a letter of appeal, calling on Shanghai’s students to practice thrift and save one-fifth of their living expenses for the strikers. It also urged Chinese employers and workers in Chinese-owned factories to come to support the strike. The day before, the Shanghai Students’ Society for National-Salvation made a similar statement. Even Li Zongren, one of the top Nationalist leaders, sent a telegram to the express his
support for the strike. 192

The protraction of the massive strike and the widespread support it had garnered from the Chinese society at large convinced the Japanese that the strike represented more than economic demands. Rather, it was a political conspiracy against the Japanese; behind the strike were Communists and other anti-Japanese societies. Funatsu Tatsuichiro, the director-general of the Federation of Japanese Cotton Millowners' Associations, and Hidenari Terasaki, the Japanese general consul at Shanghai, both expressed such concerns to Shanghai's Chinese authorities and requested that the latter suppress and eliminate the "backers" and instigators of the strike. Meanwhile, Japanese cotton mill owners issued a statement, warning that they "would have to resort to a general lockout for self-defence". 193

The Shanghai city authorities' attitude toward the strike was relatively moderate. Officials from the Bureau of Social Affairs and the City Party Branch did go to investigate the strike and attempt to persuade workers to return to work, but shied away from using violence. Given the general anti-Japanese atmosphere and the wide support that the strike

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Zhang Weizhen, "Huiyi Shanghai fanri da bagong de yixie qingkuang", in *Shanghai fanri da bagong*, pp. 1-17.

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Ma Zhongyue, "Shanghai fanri da bagong shiji", in *Shanghai fanri da bagong*, pp. 53-69.
enjoyed, the Shanghai city authorities had sound reasons to fear that they would lose credibility or legitimacy for their rule if they proved too conciliatory to the Japanese and too tough to Chinese workers. Moreover, because most Japanese cotton mills were located within the concessions, the Chinese authorities did not have much power or responsibility over them. However, if only for the purposes of restoring peace and order and pacifying the Japanese, some way had to be found to end the strike. Therefore, Shanghai’s mayor Wu Tiecheng turned to his close friend, Du Yuesheng, president of the Local Association of Shanghai (Shanghai difang xiehui), for help. Meanwhile, Funatsu Tatsuichiro also asked Du for mediation. Du Yuesheng seemed also acceptable to the striking workers, especially to the strike’s leadership organ, the Shanghai General Trade Union, whose chairman Zhu Xuefan was a protege of Du and often reported to Du about how the strike proceeded. On his part, Du showed a readiness to mediate, for he saw the mediation as a good chance to enhance his personal influence and prestige. With Du’s mediation on November 25, the Japanese employers accepted most of the conditions for resumption of work put forward by striking workers’ representatives, including an increase in wages; no dismissals without reasons; no beating or name-calling of

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194 Zhu Xuefan, "Kangri minzu tongyi zhanxian yu Shanghai shachang gongren fanri da bagong".
workers; a 30-minute meal break; and pay for extra work hours on Sunday. Thus, the strike at Shanghai ended up with the Japanese concession to Chinese workers.

2. The Strike at Qingdao

The strike at Qingdao was a direct response to the strike at Shanghai and bore some resemblances to the latter. When the Shanghai strike was under way, its leadership, the Strike Committee, sent representatives to Qingdao to instigate workers in the Japanese factories to take concerted action. Such efforts were facilitated by the close connections (business affiliation and exchanges of workers) between the two cities' Japanese cotton mills. Like their Shanghai counterparts, the workers in Qingdao were primarily concerned with improvement of their own lot, which was reflected in their such demands as wage increase, extension of break, no dismissal of workers without reasons and recognition of trade unions and subsidies for union representatives. Moreover, the Qingdao strike was staged in the same context of Japanese invasion and the growth of an anti-Japanese movement. Workers

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Ma Zhongyue, "Shanghai fanri da bagong shiji".

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Wang Qin (translated from Japanese), "Yijiu sanliu nian dong Qingdao fangzhi gongren bagong" (Qingdao cotton mill strike in the winter of 1936), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 566-574.
were ready to take advantage of this favorable situation to fight for their interests.

On the other hand, the Qingdao strike exhibited its own characteristics when compared to the strike at Shanghai. The most important characteristic of the strike at Qingdao was the lack of the kind of active underground Communist organization and nationalist-affiliated general trade union as existed in Shanghai. The leading forces of the strike came from secret trade unions camouflaged in such organizations as the Martial Arts Society and other secret societies. Many of them were skilled workers and union activists in the 1925 and 1929 strikes. They saw the Shanghai strike in particular and the anti-Japanese national-salvation movement in general as a good movement for action, particularly to gain legitimacy for trade unions. (As noted above, recognition of trade unions was among the strikers' demands.) On the eve of and during the strike, the secret unions at different Japanese factories came together and formed some unified, even though loose, liaison organs in mobilizing workers and coordinating their strike activities. 197 Apparently, the leadership of the Qingdao strike was not dominated by the two major political forces,

Communists and Nationalists, as in the case of Shanghai, and was therefore more popular-based.

Another feature of the Qingdao strike was that it had a more articulate anti-Japanese tone, which was demonstrated in such slogans as "Down with the Japanese factories" and "Down with imperialism" and in some workers' acts of physically attacking Japanese managerial personnel and Japanese residents. Partly because of this anti-Japanese nature, some Nationalist city officials were not only sympathetic with the strikers, but also directly involved in instigating the strike. Some Japanese observers claimed that the city's Public Security Bureau and the Bureau of Social Affairs attempted to appease workers and had no intention to outlaw the strike, while the director (Chen Keyao) of the Bureau of Social Affairs' labor section actually participated in "plotting" the strike. In the whole week after the Japanese filed an appeal to the Chinese city authorities for mediation or suppression, no effective action was taken by Chinese side. When the Japanese general consul at Qingdao complained about this to Qingdao's mayor Shen Honglie, the latter suggested that most of the workers' demands (those on economic matters) were reasonable and that the Japanese consul should pass on them to Japanese companies and solve the strike through negotiations. In view of the strong anti-Japanese tone of the strike and tolerant attitude of the Chinese city authorities, the
Japanese observers held that the strike in Qingdao far exceeded the limit of an economically-motivated strike and was more serious than the strike in Shanghai. The Japanese may have exaggerated the inactivity of the city authorities. Instead of being inactive, the Bureau of Social Affair did, from the very beginning, try to persuade workers to resume work before negotiating on their demands and the involvement of the director of the Bureau’s labor section in instigation of the strike may be only an isolated case. What the city authorities attempted to do was to avoid using violence against workers and to end the strike by peaceful means. To the city officials, it would be unwise for them, under the Japanese pressure, to adopt high-handed measures such as military suppression in dealing with their compatriots, Chinese workers, in the face of the Japanese invasion of China and the increasingly surging anti-Japanese outcries nationwide. In this sense, they were not insusceptible to Chinese nationalism.

Considering the strong anti-Japanese nature of the strike and the ineffectiveness of the Chinese local authorities in handling the strike, the Japanese decided to take tough actions on their own. On December 2, the Association of

198 Wang Qin (translated from Japanese), "Yijiu sanliu nian dong Qingdao fangzhi gongren baogong", in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 566-574.
Japanese Cotton Mill Owners announced closure of all Japanese cotton mills at Qingdao. Meanwhile, Japanese marines landed in the city in the name of protecting Japanese residents and property. "99 This was a tactic the Japanese had repeatedly exploited in the past. Its main purpose was to force the Chinese authorities to suppress the labor movement. The tactic proved effective. Although the Qingdao city authorities (as well as the Nanjing government) filed a protest to the Japanese against their violation of China's sovereignty, they accepted all the seven terms imposed by the Japanese general consul, including dismissal of union activists and ban of anti-Japanese activities of such organizations as the city party branch and the Martial Arts Society. 200 At this juncture, the city authorities' overriding concern was to avoid a frontal confrontation with the Japanese. Under the joint coercion and supervision of Japanese and the Chinese authorities, workers returned to work on December 14. Thus, the 1936 strike in Qingdao ended with failure.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the two major strikes at

199 Shenbao, December 4, 5, 1936.

200 Wang Qin (translated from Japanese), "Qingdao fangzhi chang baozong yu haijun luzhan dui donglu" (Qingdao cotton mill strike and the landing of Japanese marines), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 574-582.
the Japanese cotton mills in Shanghai and Qingdao on the eve of the outbreak of the all-out Sino-Japanese war. I intend to suggest that the crisis, which started from the Japanese invasion in 1931, helped mobilize workers and created a favorable atmosphere for trade unions to reemerge. It was under the pretext of uniting workers for the cause of national salvation that the Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU) came into existence and assumed the leadership role in the strike. Although it registered with the Nationalist government and was an official organization, the SGTU also acted as a patron of workers. For example, the strike under its leadership did address workers' immediate economic interests. The same can be said of the situation at Qingdao, where secret unions seized upon the movement of national crisis, surfaced and formally demanded legitimacy, among other things. It should be emphasized that while the strikers or unions embraced Chinese nationalism, they were not fighting for some abstract concept but for their own concrete interests. If nationalism had any meaning for them, it was because nationalism was relevant to and could serve their immediate interests, particularly economic interests.

The national crisis also helped unions and labor movement in a direct way, that is, by pushing the Chinese regime to tolerate the formation of social organizations and their activities against the Japanese. This partly explained why the
two strikes evolved into so large a scale, affecting almost all Japanese cotton mills in the two cities, and lasted so long (nineteen days in Shanghai and twenty-five days in Qingdao). In both cities, Nationalist local authorities made no effective efforts to bring the strikes to a quick end. More importantly, some officials even showed their sympathy and support for the strikes.

The two strikes also suggested that in the whole Nanjing decade the Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-shek, even though often depicted as an authoritarian regime, was far from establishing a firm control over labor organizations and the labor movement. It could not forestall the formation of organizations like the Shanghai General Trade Union and had to recognize its legitimacy when the union took shape against the regime’s will; unable to solve the strike on its own, the regime had to seek the mediation of a secret society leader (Du Yuesheng). In Qingdao, the secret unions were even more autonomous from the Nationalist regime.

The inability of the Nationalist regime to neutralize unions and the labor movement may be accounted for by many factors including the regime’s inherent weakness (factional struggles) and the existence of foreign enterprises as discussed in this and the preceding two chapters. Yet there was another factor that helped undermine the Nationalists’ grasp or influence on the labor movement: the Communist
challenge. In describing the Shanghai strike, I only touched on the Communist role in passing. For a better understanding of the status and character of trade unions, there is the need for a more detailed examination of the CCP's relations with them. This is based on the assumption (it is a major theme of this thesis) that relatively autonomous social organizations could exist in the context of different political forces competing for power. The CCP was such a political force and it occupied the same position as the Nationalists had in the warlord era (as described in chapter 3).
Chapter 7 The Chinese Communist Party and Trade Unions

From its birth in 1921 to its success in winning national power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) paid great attention to the worker movement, especially to organizing trade unions among workers. In its very first resolution (1921), the CCP clearly stated that "the Party’s basic task" was "to establish industrial trade unions" and that the party needed to set up specific organs to do research on how to develop trade unions. In 1926, the CCP further emphasized that "to organize trade unions should be the Party’s central issue". Even when exiled to the countryside under the Nationalists’ "white terror" after 1927, the Communists did not abandon their efforts to mobilize workers and organize trade unions in urban centers. The point was that the CCP, as a political organization with the ambition to seize the national power, needed workers as an ally in confronting its powerful rivals, especially GMD.

The CCP’s involvement in the workers’ movement before 1949 can be divided into three stages: (1) the warlord era; (2) the period corresponding to the Nationalist Nanjing decade.

201 "Zhongguo gongchandang de diyi ge jieyi" (The CCP’s first resolution) (July 1921); "Zhonggong zhongyang zhigong weiyuan hui guanyu guanguo zhigong yundong taolun huiyi jieyi" (The resolution of CCP Central Committee’s labor committee on workers’ movement), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian (Selected documents of CCP Central Committee on workers’ movement) (Beijing: Dangan chubanshe, 1985), pp. 1-3, 110-142.
and (3) the years of resistance against the Japanese invasion and the GMD-CCP civil war (1937-1949). In the warlord era, especially since 1924, the CCP, weak and small in number, undertook the labor movement largely under the sponsorship of the GMD, then a revolutionary force. In the following ten years, the CCP’s labor movement in the Nationalist-controlled areas suffered severe losses under the Nationalist "white terror" and the CCP’s own "left adventurist" or "left opportunist" line, which virtually rendered the existence of "red" or Communist-led unions impossible. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 marked a turning point in the Communist labor history. The CCP’s union activities gained legitimacy under the Second United Front between the GMD and the CCP. Moreover, the retreat of Nationalist forces from major cities left a vacuum for Communists. When the GMD returned to these cities after 1945, they found many unions were under strong influence of the CCP.

In discussing the relationship between the GMD and trade unions in the warlord period in chapter 3, I suggested that they exploited each other as allies. Those unions that were under the Nationalist leadership had to be concerned with workers’ welfare rather than just the Nationalists’ partisan interests. The same can be said of the relationship between the CCP and trade unions. Through the twenty-eight years
(1921-1949), the Communists were never able to effectively manipulate workers and trade unions and impose the Party's will on them. They alienated workers when they attempted to do so as witnessed by the Nanjing decade. To ensure workers' support, the Party had to work with them as their partners and take the workers' interests into serious account, as happened in the warlord period (1921-1927) and the civil war years (1945-1949). Despite some changes in the CCP's specific tactics, their involvement in the labor movement helped, in one way or another, preserve trade unions' popular character.

In the following pages of this chapter, I will first examine the CCP's attitude toward trade unions and its strategies in organizing unions in the warlord era. Then, I will focus on the Communist-inspired union activities in the Nationalist-controlled areas between 1927 and 1945.

1. Alliance between the Party and Trade Unions in the Warlord Era, 1921-1927

As a Leninist party, the CCP, from the outset, was concerned to establish its leadership over unions it helped establish. On the other hand, however, the Party recognized the differences between itself and unions and the necessity to allow unions to maintain some autonomy. Such a position was reflected in a series of CCP documents in the warlord era. In its very first resolution, the CCP identified itself as the
vanguard of the proletariat and a political organization of all proletarian elements with class consciousness, while viewing the trade union as an organization of all workers (regardless of their political views). As a popular organization, the trade union's purpose was to protect workers' immediate interests and to improve workers' conditions. It had two specific functions: (1) to sign collective contracts with employers on behalf of workers and (2) to ensure "equal pay for equal work" regardless of differences in race (foreigners or Chinese), gender and age. In another document (1924), the CCP further defined the popular nature of trade unions and their specific tasks. "Unions should represent workers' will and requests" and acted as workers' own organizations. Its multiple tasks included striving for wage increases, reduction of work hour, Sunday and holiday vacations, improvement of working conditions, protection of child and women workers, workers' occupational education and helping the unemployed and above all resisting the oppression of workers by capitalists.

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202 "Zhongguo gongchandang dier ci quanguo daibiao dahui guanyu 'gonghui yundong yu gongchandang' de jueyian" (CCP second national congress' resolution on "union movement and CCP") (July 1922), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian (Selected documents of CCP Central Committee on workers' movement), pp. 11-15.

203 "Zhonggong zhongyang wei gonghui tiaoli shi gao quanguo gongren" (CCP Central Committee's notice to workers on trade union regulation), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren
Based on this perception of the character of trade unions, the CCP held that while unions must accept the Party’s political and ideological leadership and guidance, they should also maintain organizational autonomy. "Trade unions should be independent". The Party’s direction of the labor movement lay in its ability to influence workers through the work of factory party branches and to raise economic and political demands that accorded to workers’ interests rather than monopoly of what ought to be done by trade unions. Party activities in factories must be undertaken through trade unions. The party and trade unions needed to separate organizationally from each other. The former should help unions develop independently as the masses’ organizations. "It is most undesirable to substitute party branches for trade unions", for that would "undermine" unions’ popular character. To ensure the organizational autonomy of trade unions, union leadership should be assumed by workers rather than by party members. "Unions democratization needed to be carried out" and

yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 70-72.

204 "Zhonggong kuoda zhiweihui gonghui yundong wenti yijiean" (Resolution of CCP expanded executive committee on union movement), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 34-38.

205 "Zhonggong zhongyang disan ci kuoda zhiweihui zhigong yundong yijue an" (The third expanded executive committee’s resolution on workers’ movement), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, 143-150.
trade union work must be conducted through workers’ congresses. 206

These theories were formulated by the CCP central committee to define the relationship between the party organization and trade unions affiliated with it. The party’s stress on these unions’ popular character and their organizational autonomy was out of its consideration for political expediency and ultimately for the benefit of the Party. Only by showing concerns for workers’ interests could the communists effectively mobilize workers and entice them to join unions, whereas the party’s radical political programs would have had little appeal to most workers. Moreover, in most years before 1949 including the warlord era, the CCP, as a weak and "illegal" organization, had to work secretly in urban centers to avoid persecution from the warlord regime and later on the Nationalist state power and it needed social organizations such as trade unions, which seemed not or less threatening politically to the state power, to instigate workers. Without the cover of trade unions, the party organizations would face ruthless suppression from its rivals, which would in turn scare away most non-party workers. Such a

206 "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu beifang zhigong yundong wenti de zhishi xin" (CCP central committee’s directive on workers’ movement in North China); "Zhongyang zhi jiangsu shengwei xin" (CCP central committee’s letter to Jiangsu provincial committee), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 212-213; 234-238.
situation required a separation between the party organs and trade unions in organization. 207

Not only in theory, but also in practice did the CCP stress striving for and protection of workers’ interests as the primary strategy to mobilize workers and organize trade unions. Most strikes initiated by the CCP before the 1925 May Thirtieth Movement were concerned with such issues as wage increases, improvement in treatment of workers, and legitimacy of worker clubs or trade unions rather than radical and revolutionary programs. In other words, these strikes were economic struggles which targeted employers rather than political struggles directly against the warlord state power. Take the worker strike and Communist union activities in Anyuan Lukuang (Anyuan Coal Mine and Zhuzhou-Pingxiang Railway) as an example. In the early 1920s, Anyuan was a major stronghold of the CCP-led worker movement. Such famous Communist leaders as Mao Zedong, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi once went there, making investigations and mobilizing workers. In May 1922, a workers’ club was formed with Li Lisan as its director. The club’s alleged purpose was protecting workers’ interests and relieving workers of oppression and suffering.

207 "Zhongguo gongchandang diliu ci guanguo daibiao dahui zhigong yundong jueyi an" (Resolution of CCP Central Committee’s sixth national congress on workers’ movement), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 262-276.
In September of 1922, the club initiated the first major strike at Anyuan. It raised seventeen demands, all concerning the workers' immediate interests. Among these demands were the conversion of the workers' club into a trade union and recognition of the union's right to represent workers in dealing with the authorities of the coal mine and the railway; consultation with the union on matters of worker dismissal; clearing up all outstanding pay to workers; paying workers during the strike, sick leave, weddings and funerals; no beating of workers; and wage increase by ten cents daily for those workers whose daily income was less than forty cents. The worker club emphasized that the strike had nothing to do with politics or military affairs. Instead, it was only concerned with the survival of workers and finding a solution to the problem of workers' starvation. 208

On the other hand, the workers' club at Anyuan made great efforts to win the sympathy of other forces for the strike, the Hong Bang and the local elite (merchants and gentry), for instance. The Hong Bang was a secret society based on brotherhood and patriarchal system, involving people of lower status such as handicraftsmen and vagrants. It was also an

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influential force in Anyuan, with its ringleader serving as "advisor" of the Anyuan mine and many "small heads" (xiao toumu) as foremen and clerks. To prevent the gang from disturbing the worker strike and to win its cooperation in maintaining social order during the strike, Li Lisan, the director of the worker club, personally visited the chieftain of the Hong Bang and developed friendship with him on the basis of personal friendship. The gang leader turned out to be cooperative with the worker club as the latter expected. Moreover, the Communist-led work club took the initiative to get the Merchant Association (or Chamber of Commerce) and local gentry involved in mediating the disputes between the club and the mine management. In doing so, the worker club assumed a spokesman of the workers, whom it depicted in turn as pitiable victims of abject poverty and exploitation. 209

The above tactics of the workers' club won wide support of both workers and the sympathy of society at large for the strike. The authorities of the Anyuan Mine were forced to accept most of the workers' club's demands, including recognition of the club's legitimacy. The victory of the strike greatly enhanced the worker club's prestige and influence among workers. Workers actively participated in the

club (trade union) and "risked their life to safeguard the trade union" against the sabotage by the employer, "scabs" and military police. The club continued to work as a champion of workers' interests. Particularly it abolished the contracting system and replaced it with a cooperative system. Under the contracting system, workers suffered from double exploitation of both employers and labor contractors. The latter, taking advantage of their position as go-between, especially their responsibility of alloting wages, battened themselves on workers: they received money from the employer in silver dollars, but payed out wages to workers in copper dollars. By contrast, the new cooperative system allowed workers to take care of their own pay. Moreover, the worker club (trade union) also set up schools for workers' children and recreational facilities. Most important, the club organized an "arbitration committee" (caipan weiyuanhui) to solve disputes among workers and protect workers from the abuses of the state's judicial system. 210

Another stronghold of the Communist-inspired worker movement in the warlord era was the Changxindian section (near Beijing) of the Beijing-Hankou Railway. In 1922, the

210
Liu Shaoqi, "Anyuan lukuang gongren julebu lueshi" (A brief history of the workers' club in Anyuan) (August 10, 1923); Liu Shaoqi and Li Qiushi, "Julebu gaizu gaikuang" (Reorganization of workers' club) (October 1923), in Liu Shaoqi yu Anyuan gongren yundong (Liu Shaoqi and workers' movement in Anyuan), pp. 45-47.
Communists organized a workers’ club (trade union) there and, in its name, raised the following demands to the railway authorities: dismissal of the unpopular chief foreman, an increase in workers’ wages, improvement of the treatment of workers, and consultation with the worker club on labor recruitment. When rejected, the club staged a massive worker strike, which forced the railway authorities to accept most of the above demands. The strike, in turn, stimulated the formation of trade unions or worker clubs in other sections of the railway. 211

The CCP’s stress on economic struggle as a major strategy in organizing trade unions was also evidenced in the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925. As I mentioned in part one of this dissertation, this movement gave the Chinese workers’ movement an anti-imperialist orientation. The CCP did not miss this movement as a good chance to expand its influence among workers. It seized the leadership of the newly-established Shanghai General Trade Union and called for a joint worker strike. Instead of putting forward grandiose political slogans, the Communists showed great concern for workers’ immediate interests. This was reflected in the following requests they raised in the name of the general trade union: punishment of culprit of the massacre and compensation for the

victims; recognition of workers' right to form trade unions and to strike; no beating of workers; improvement of sanitary conditions of factories; no maltreatment of child and women workers; no employment of foreign policemen. Such Communist agitation contributed to the wide mobilization of workers and formation or growth of trade unions in Shanghai during the "May Thirtieth Movement". 212

It was thus evident that the trade unions under the CCP largely acted as a champion of workers' interests, especially workers' immediate economic benefits, and that the involvement of the CCP as a political party in the worker movement did not sacrifice the popular character of trade unions. Instead of imposing its will upon workers or trade unions, the CCP tried to accommodate its own political programs to the workers' conditions. Nonetheless, campaigning for workers' economic interests was not the goal of the Communist-led labor movement, but only a tactic the CCP exploited to win the confidence and alliance of workers in its contending for national power with other powerful forces (the warlords and the GMD). As Liu Shaoqi, a major Communist leader of labor movement, suggested, the economic struggle for workers' immediate interests such as wage increases and reduction in

work hours was insignificant compared to the political struggle for seizure of state power; and such a struggle was necessary simply because it could bring immediate and visible benefits to workers and thereby make the latter aware of their distinct interests and consciously united under the CCP. 213

In addition to directly organizing trade unions among workers, the Communists also tried to penetrate various "signboard trade unions" or "sham trade unions" (zhaopai gonghui) and bring them into the communist orbit. The term "signboard trade unions" was invented by the Communists to identify those trade unions under the sponsorship or influence of non-Communist politicians, capitalists and foremen, and most important, intellectuals. These unions emerged with the rapid development of Chinese native industries and the growth of workers in both number and strength in the late 1910s and early 1920s. They often bore impressive names (e.g., the Chinese Trade Union [Zhongguo gonghui], the Chinese Labor Federation [Zhongguo laogong lianhehui], and the National Labor Association of China [Zhonghuo quanguo gongjie xiejinhui]), but had no branches at the grassroots level and some of them even did not have workers as the majority of their constituency. While the organizers of "signboard unions", out of different motives, sometimes expressed their

213 Chen Shaochou, Liu Shaoqi zai baiqu (Liu Shaoqi in the "white area") (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 15.
concern for improvement of workers' conditions, they were more interested in labor-capital cooperation, especially in Chinese-owned enterprises. 214

From the CCP's point of view, the signboard trade unions competed with it in winning over workers and were an obstacle for the Party to establish "authentic trade unions" (zheng gonghui). The CCP's tactic in dealing with these signboard unions was to infiltrate them, influence their members and gradually grasp their leadership. Meanwhile, the Party deemed it expedient to cooperate with the signboard unions in launching some struggles for workers' benefits and other activities, thereby to change them into Communist-led unions. 215

In late 1921 and early 1922, the Secretariat for Labor Organization (Laodong zuhe shujichu), the top Communist leadership organ for labor movement, and some signboard unions jointly organized an assembly to protest the warlord government's conciliatory foreign policy and held a memorial for some trade union leaders who were executed by warlords in Hunan. The CCP even invited representatives of some signboard unions to participate in the Communist-sponsored First


215 "Zhongguo gongchandang dier ci quanguo daibiao dahui guanyu 'gonghui yundong yu gongchandang' de jueyian" (CCP second national congress' resolution on "trade union movement and the CCP), (July 1922), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 11-15.
National Labor Congress at Guangzhou in May 1922. 216

On the other hand, the CCP and signboard unions often got into mutual conflict, with each other attempting to gain more influence among workers. Signboard unions once prevailed in the aftermath of the 1923 February Seventh Massacre, when Communist-led unions suffered a severe setback. Since then, many signboard unions turned to openly denounce the CCP and claimed that they favored "peaceful self-salvation" rather than radical activities such as strikes. In the meantime, they requested that the warlord government legalize and protect those trade unions "beneficial to society". 217 This did not mean, however, that the "signboard" unions surrendered themselves to the government as the Communists condemned. What they wanted was self-preservation under the high-handed policy of the warlord regime. On their part, the Communist-led trade unions would soon stage a comeback and once again challenge the signboard unions under the first united front with the GMD against the warlord regime.

As far as the CCP was concerned, the warlord regime and the GMD constituted far more formidable political rivals than the signboard unions. If the Party deemed the warlords as an immediate target of the Chinese revolution, it saw a potential and long-term adversary in its temporary ally, the

216Wang Yongxi, Zhongguo gonghui shi, pp. 120-121.
217Minguo ribao, March 15, April 10, 1923.
Nationalists. From the outset, therefore, the CCP attempted to frustrate the efforts of both warlords and the GMD to neutralize and control unions. In 1925, when the warlord-dominated Beijing government passed a trade union regulation, the CCP immediately denounced it for restricting union activities. It claimed that workers should have their own "free trade unions", unions free from the government interference. The CCP was not only opposed to its enemy's (the warlords') interference with unions, but also tried, during the first United Front (1924-1927), to keep its ally (GMD) away from trade unions. A party resolution in 1926 correctly pointed out that the GMD, like other political parties, aspired for power and therefore must want to influence workers and union movement. The result (success or failure) of the GMD's efforts in this respect would depend on the CCP's policies and action. Even though the CCP worked as an ally of the GMD in the revolution against the warlord regime, it should not help the GMD to infiltrate worker organizations. The best assistance that the CCP should provide to the GMD in the labor movement was not to establish GMD-led trade unions or allow existing unions to join in the GMD, but to form unions of pure working class and guide them, if

218 "Zhonggong zhongyang wei gonghui tiaoli shi gao quanguo gongren" (CCP Central Committee’s notice to workers on trade union regulation), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 70-72.
necessary, to support the "national revolution" under the GMD. In the meantime, the CCP insisted that its members should penetrate those trade unions under the Nationalist influence, forming "trade union groups (gonghui xiaozu)" within them and winning confidence of their members in order to "completely transform such trade unions". In this process, the Communists should particularly capitalize on the "economic conflict between workers and businessmen" to "expose the (bad) nature of GMD" and let workers know the advantages of siding with the CCP.

Indeed, despite the formation of GMD-CCP alliance late in the warlord era, the CCP persisted in undermining, often successfully, the GMD's influence over labor movement. Even in Guangdong, the GMD's power base, the CCP was able to sabotage GMD-led trade unions, including the powerful Guangdong General Trade Union (GGTU), which consisted of about 120 grassroots trade unions. In a GGTU leadership reelection held in December 1923, a pro-Communist figure, Zeng Xisheng (chair of Oil Industry Trade Union) managed to edge into the GGTU's top leadership and replaced Huang Huanting (a GMD member) as

219 "Zhonggong kuoda zhiweihui gonghui yundong wenti jueyi an" (CCP expanded executive committee's resolution on trade union movement), in Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanbian, pp. 34-38.

220 "Zhongguo gongchandang disi ci guanguo daibiao dahui duiyu zhigong yundong zhi yijue an" (CCP fourth national congress' resolution on workers' movement) (January 1925), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongre yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 44-54.
president of the GGTU. The Nationalists and the unions under their influence were forced to withdraw from the GGTU and formed another general trade union. Later, the latter's branch union in Fushan city split into two (probably under the communist sabotage), one remaining under the GMD and the other joining the Communist-led Fushan Congress of Trade Unions. 221

In May 1924, the CCP formed the Guangzhou Workers' Congress (Guangzhou gongren daibiaohui) as the Communist-led labor movement's headquarters in Guangzhou, with a membership of forty grassroots-level trade unions. By the end of 1924, its membership increased to seventy, accounting for half the total number of unions in Guangzhou. In Shanghai, the Nationalist-led Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions were overshadowed by the increasing powerful Shanghai General Trade Union which emerged under the CCP's sponsorship in the "May Thirtieth Movement". 222 The GMD, especially its right wing, felt quite uneasy with the rapid growth of Communist-led trade unions and tried to contain it. On the one hand, the regime speeded up its efforts to organize trade unions under its own leadership, often by exploiting secret societies and foremen. On the other, the right-oriented Nationalists attempted to sabotage the Communist-led trade unions and limit their activities.

221 Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 2, p. 351.

Eventually, they resorted to violence, which culminated in the anti-Communist coup on April 27, 1927. The coup marked the end of the first GMD-CCP alliance. Since then, the CCP turned to openly oppose the GMD's involvement in trade unions. It accused the GMD of "destroying or reorganizing trade unions" and called on workers and Communist party members to resist the penetration of unions by the Nationalists, under the pretext that trade unions should be an "authentic mass organization" of the working class. Specifically, the CCP raised such slogans as "let workers elect their own trade unions; oppose appointment of unions by any organs". 223

In the above discussion, I have attempted to suggest that during the warlord era the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) posed a challenge to other political forces, not only to the warlord state power but also to the Nationalists and various "signboard trade unions," and compromised their ability to neutralize or control the worker movement and trade unions. Due to similar checks from other rival forces (particularly the GMD), the CCP was equally unable to dominate the worker movement and dictate to the trade unions under its influence.

223 "Zhonggong zhongyang jinji huiyi zuijin zhigong yundong yijuean" (Resolution of CCP Central Committee’s emergency meeting on recent labor movement) (August 7, 1927); "Zhongyang tonggao diba hao--guanyu zhigong yundong" (The central committee’s eighth circular on the labor movement) (August 25, 1927), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanwu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, pp. 196-198;201-204.
With different political forces wooing the support of workers, the latter had more choices and would ally with the one which could offer them the most. As a weak newcomer, the CCP more desperately needed workers as an ally. For this purpose, it had to take workers' interests seriously. Thus, it was not surprising that Communist-led trade unions usually put forward demands on workers' immediate economic interests in initiating strikes. They worked more as a champion of workers's interests than a tool of the Communists.

2. "Red Trade Union" Movement in the "White Area" 1927-1937

In the ten years following the 1927 April Twenty-Seventh Coup, the GMD regime became the dominant political force and assumed the national power. For their part, the Communists were forced to retreat from cities and concentrate in the rural areas. They managed to found their own state power base first in Jiangxi and then in the Northwest centered in Yanan, and thus remained a major rival of the GMD regime. The Communists not only challenged the GMD through land (peasant) revolution, but also by inciting the population in the Nationalist-controlled cities, particularly workers. In other words, the CCP still regarded mobilization of workers as a major strategy in contending for national power. Moreover, in the two years immediately after 1927, the CCP continued to
exploit the tactics of "economic" struggle and of utilizing existing non-Communist worker-related organisations such as Nationalist-sanctioned "yellow" unions in carrying out the worker movement. Over time, however (from 1930), the CCP gradually deviated from such moderate and practical tactics and resorted to more radical ones--"political" struggle and "red union" movement, which excluded cooperation with or using "yellow" unions. No matter what their specific tactics, the Communists' activities among workers in the Nationalist-controlled areas helped to undermine the GMD's efforts to neutralize trade unions as a popular organization.

As mentioned in chapter four of this dissertation, the Nanjing decade witnessed the emergence of "yellow" trade unions, which partly came out of the Nationalists' attempt to neutralize trade unions as a radical and revolutionary force and to get rid of communist influence on the worker movement. These yellow unions posed a persistent problem for the CCP: whether the Communists should work with the yellow unions or openly reject them and focus on development of independent "red" (Communist-led) trade unions. Initially, the CCP had a relatively pragmatic assessment of the situation of the worker movement under the Nationalist rule. While regarding the formation and expansion of red unions as the primary task of the communist worker movement, the Party did not miss the fact that yellow unions were the only "lawful" trade unions in the
Nationalist-controlled areas. Therefore, the CCP decided that it was expedient for Communists to work with those yellow unions. In a series of important documents from 1927 to 1929, the CCP reiterated that Communists should go into and work within any yellow unions. Otherwise, they would leave the workers under the influence of "reactionaries". "At present, yellow trade unions still involved and influenced the majority of the masses...Any proletarian party should not neglect this reality and underestimate the yellow unions' role among workers". In view of such a reality, the CCP held that it should not openly denounce the yellow union as a whole, but should only oppose its leaders; instead of forming "red" unions within their "yellow" counterparts and using the former against the latter, Communists should join in the yellow union and work among its ordinary members and win them over to the communist side. "There were no differences between the yellow union and the red union in terms of their organizational form. What made the difference was whether the yellow union can really represent workers and fight for their interests... Therefore, we (Communists) should infiltrate yellow unions...not for expanding propaganda on red unions, but for relieving workers of their suffering" and leading their daily struggle, and in this process, gradually freeing workers from the influence of yellow union leaders. The CCP warned that it would be wrong either to call on workers within yellow unions
to organize red unions or to refuse to join and work with yellow unions, which would be tantamount to abandoning the majority of masses and assisting yellow unions with their expansion. In the meantime, the Party, as in the warlord period, continued to stress the importance of economic struggle. "Economic struggle is the routine of trade unions and the only way to attract the broad masses and facilitate their organization". The Communists should try their best to increase workers' economic demands in order to counterattack the "cheating" and influence of "reformism" (gailiang zhuyi) advocated by yellow trade unions and to enhance the communist prestige among workers. 224

The CCP's tactic of economic struggle and working within "yellow" unions were the only practical choices for the CCP in conducting the worker movement in the Nationalist-controlled areas. It would have been effective in the long run.

Unfortunately, the Party soon began, in late 1929, to change

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224 "Zhonggong zhongyang jinji huiyi zuijin zhigong yundong yijuean" (August 7, 1927); "Zhongyang tonggao diba hao--guanyu zhigong yundong" (August 25, 1927); "Zhongguo gongchandang diliu ci quanguo daibiao dahui zhigong yundong jueyian" (Resolution of the CCP sixth national congress on workers' movement) (June 1929); "Zhongyang zhi Fujian shengwei de xinxian guanyu chengshi gongzuo zhigong yundong deng wenti" (CCP central committee's letter CCP Fujian provincial committee--On urban work and labor movement); "Zhongguo gongchandang diwu ci quanguo daibiao daohui zhigong yundong yijue an" (Resolution of CCP fifth national congress workers' movement) (May 1927), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, vol. 1, pp. 196-198; 201-204; 262-276; 336-368; 376-380'172-183.
such a moderate (or defensive) tactic and replace it with a more radical (or offensive) one, which endorsed open "political struggle" (armed uprising) and total destruction of yellow unions in the Nationalist-controlled urban centers. This change in tactics came out from the CCP's new but untenable assessment of the political situation in China. On the one hand, the CCP underestimated the strength of the Nationalist state power and regarded the recurrent wars between the Nationalist faction under Chiang Kai-shek and other Nationalist factions (Li Zongren, Yan Xishan, and Feng Yuxiang) as a major crisis of the Nationalist rule and even signs of its imminent collapse. On the other hand, the CCP overestimated its own influence and especially the workers' interest in the Communist-led revolution. Therefore, the CCP anticipated that "a new tide of revolution" was "upcoming" and that the Party would soon be able to seize national power from the GMD. "With the coming of the revolutionary tide nationwide, the revolution could first succeed within one or several provinces or regions"; to "prepare for" such a success and further to "establish a nationwide revolutionary political

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225 This new tactic was later labelled in the CCP's history as "left opportunism" (zuqing jihui zhuyi) or "left adventurism" (zuqing maoxian zhuyi) or "left putschism" (zuqing mangdong zhuyi), which prevailed within the CCP under Qu Qiubai, Li Lisan, and Wang Ming during the late 1929s and early 1930s.
power are the general guideline of the Party at present". 226

It was on the basis of this sort of optimistic assessment of the situation that the CCP formulated the offensive tactic of the Communist-led worker movement in Nationalist-controlled areas, especially in "key cities" (zhongxin chengshi). The new tactic had the following characteristics. First, it focused on an "independent" "red trade union movement" (chise gonghui yundong), while rejecting the previous practice of utilizing and working with "yellow" unions. With such a tactic, the Communists "should not simply oppose yellow (union) leaders, but should also fight against the yellow union itself"; they must set up "red union branches within yellow unions" and use the formers' platforms to confront the latter's. 227 Communist union activists would become "the GMD's captives if they remained under the cover of yellow unions" and failed to "reject the yellow union as a
whole and to "initiate independent struggle by using open red union platforms". The red unions should independently organize worker activities and lead the masses of workers away from yellow unions and finally "wipe out" the latter. Beside setting up red unions within yellow unions, the Communists should also speed up the formation of red unions among workers who were outside yellow unions. "The expansion and consolidation of red trade unions is the most important and basic task of the current worker movement". 228

Furthermore, the CCP's new tactic of worker movement highlighted the primacy of "red" unions (or workers') "political" struggle, directly targeting the Nationalist state, vis-a-vis the "economic" struggle aiming at capitalist employers. "Red trade unions' general task was to accelerate the mobilization of workers for struggles "against warlords, the GMD and imperialists; to support the Soviet regime (which was set up by the CCP in Jiangxi in the early 1930s) and the (Communist) Red Army; and to oppose the "tangled warfare among warlords" (different military factions of the Nationalist regime) and to assist the CCP's revolutionary war". 229 Such a

228 "Zhonggong zhongyang liujie sanzhong quanghui guanyu zhigong yundong jueyian" (Resolution of the third plenum of CCP central committee's sixth national congress on workers' movement) (September 1930), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, vol. 2, pp. 76-91.

229 "Zhonggong zhongyang liujie sanzhong quanghui guanyu zhigong yundong jueyian" (Resolution of the third plenum of CCP
"political struggle" would primarily take the form of "political strikes" and "joint strikes". The CCP demanded that every strike should be linked to politics and be an occasion to expose the evil nature of the Nationalist state; and that in conducting strikes the red unions must "firmly put forward political slogans" such as "oppose the GMD", "oppose white terror", "oppose warlord wars", "oppose attack on the Soviet Union", and "freedoms for strike and trade unions". In addition, the new tactic stressed the "openness" of the red union activities (or Communist-led labor movement in general). The CCP required that "red" unions should conduct open struggle--"openly" call and organize strikes, demonstrations and "mass rallies", and prepare themselves for open resistance to possible suppression from the police or military of the Nationalist state. For this purpose, red unions must form worker pickets and armed forces. 230

This tactic was well received by the CCP local leadership, in Shandong province for example. In the early central committee's sixth national congress on labor movement) (September 1930), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, vol. 2, pp. 76-91.

230 "Zhongyang tongling di qishi hao--muqian zhengzhi xingshi yu dang de zhongxin celue" (CCP central committee's seventieth circular--on current political situation and Party's central tactics) (February 26, 1930); "Xinde geming gaochao yu yisheng huo jisheng de shouxian shengli" (A new revolutionary tide and victory first within one or several provinces) (June 11, 1930), in Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian, vol. 2, pp. 8-15, 41-52.
1930s, the provincial party committee repeatedly expressed its readiness to follow the order from the CCP central committee and to take it as a priority to carry out the "open" "red union movement". "Our new provincial committee will use every open means (yiqie gongkai luxian) to... organize industrial red unions and to instigate joint strikes". "It is our party's pressing task to widely develop red unions, to expand their popular basis, to win over the majority of the proletariat... and to eliminate yellow unions". The provincial party committee ordered its city- or county-level counterparts to "fully adopt open and mass means" in accelerating the red union movement. ^231 It called on them to "quickly" organize "joint" and "political" strikes, "political demonstrations and local uprisings", especially during the "red month of May". (This month included the International Labor Day [May the first] and was regarded by the CCP as a particularly good time period to mobilize workers.) The CCP leadership in Shandong paid special attention to Qingdao. It specifically instructed that the Qingdao party committee should, in the one month of May of 1930, admit at least 105 trade union members in the

[^231]: "Shandong shengwei shuji Ren Guozhen xiang zhongyang de baogao" (Report by Ren Guozhen, secretary of the CCP Shandong provincial committee, to the CCP central committee) (March 28, 1930); "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu chise gonghui yundong wenti de tonggao" (CCP Shandong provincial committee's circular on red union movement) (August 14, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 130-132, 165-167.
city's major industries and factories, set up thirty worker pickets, and form "preparatory committees" for the May-First Holiday at both the city level and in the four urban districts and some factories to instigate and coordinate workers' struggles. In so doing, the city party committee must advance "open", "independent" (from other parties such as the Reorganization Faction, which was influential in Qingdao), and "political" views against "imperialism, the GMD, the Reorganization Faction" and favoring the Red Army and the "Soviet (communist)" power. 232

The CCP Qingdao city committee did closely follow its provincial counterpart's directives and try to mobilize all the resources at its disposal to expand "red" trade unions. However, it turned out to be difficult to do so. The city party committee only set up two red trade unions with fourteen members in "red May" of 1930 and thus failed to fulfil the quota (105) assigned by the provincial party committee. Late in 1930, the Qingdao party committee laid down an ambitious plan to massively recruit worker activists into existing red trade unions and to expand red unions in all factories and

form a citywide worker federation before January 20, 1931. 233 Again, it fell short of its target. By February of 1931, only in fourteen factories did there exist "red" unions with sixty-eight members and fifty-one informal members (people who worked for red unions but did not formally register with the unions). A major achievement was believed to be the formation of the communist-led Qingdao Workers' Federation and the Workers' Federation of Seven Cotton Mills as well as a society of unemployed workers. 234 These may be no more than skeleton organizations given the small number of red union members in the city.

Under this radical line of the CCP central authorities in the early 1930s, the Qingdao party committee regarded and used red trade unions more as a means of partisan struggle than as an organization of workers. Even though still loudly claiming to be a champion of workers' interests, the CCP's leading organ in Qingdao was primarily concerned with seizure of political power, largely neglecting workers' immediate economic interests. It announced that "armed struggle is our catchword for action at present"; "armed struggle is aimed at

233 "Zhonggong Qingdao shiwei guanyu dangqian gongzuo de jihua anpai" (CCP Qingdao city committee's current work schedule) (December 30, 1930), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 196-202.

234 Zhang Zuodong and Jiang Huashan (eds.), Qingdao gongren yundong shi, pp. 168-169; Li Yin and Gong Yuzao (eds.), Zhonggong Qingdao dangshi (Qingdao's party history), p. 106.
taking over political power"; and for this purpose, the Party must "accelerate its work among urban workers". As a matter of fact, the Communists and red unions in Qingdao, weak and small in number, were not able to launch any armed uprisings under the close watch of the Nationalist local authorities. What they actually could do was to instigate "political strikes", organizing "political demonstrations and parades", public or "flying" rallies (feixing jihui, during which participants moved from one place to another to escape the intervention of police forces), distributing communist propaganda materials such as handbills, and making public speeches. In conducting these activities, the Communists and red union members usually openly call for overthrow of the GMD and yellow unions and support of the CCP and establishment of Soviet power, but seldom raised demands that directly concerned workers' immediate interests. It was not surprising that these Communist-instigated activities had little appeal to workers or to other urban population. Workers were unwilling to run the enormous risks of either losing jobs or being suppressed to participate in such activities, which had little to do with their own needs. In most cases, the Communists and red union members found themselves the only

235 "Zhonggong Qingdao shiwei huiyi jilu" (Meeting minutes of CCP Qingdao city committee), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, p. 154.
participants in public demonstrations that they initiated. Worse still, they often had to pay high prices for these open and political activities, for they easily exposed themselves as Communists to the Nationalist local state authorities and hence became a convenient target of suppression. It was during the process of planning and organizing some open demonstrations and parades that many Communists or red union members were arrested and even the CCP city committee was destroyed by the Nationalists. 236

Qingdao was not an isolated case, as what was termed "Left opportunism" also dominated the Communist-led worker movement in other cities or regions and brought on similar consequences. The CCP Jiangsu provincial committee and the Communist-led General Trade Union of Cotton Mills in Shanghai (Shanghai shachang zonggonghui) attempted, in mid-1930, to initiate a "joint strike" as the first step of an armed insurrection. They did succeed in holding demonstrations and even instigating some trade union members and workers to use violence, such as attacks on public transport vehicles (trolley-buses and buses). These activities, however, only incurred swift suppression from the Nationalist regime. In

236 "Zhonggong Qingdao shiwei guanyu 'bayiwu', 'baerling' gongzuo baogao" (CCP Qingdao city committee's work report on "August 15" and "August 20" [two striking days]); Chen Shaomin, "Qingdao gongren yundong yu zuoqing lu xian de yingxiang" (Qingdao's worker movement and Left deviation), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 167-171, 310-311.
Wuhan, the communist-led General Trade Union of Hubei Province organized a "flying rally" to "protest warlord wars and support the Red Army" in June of 1930, only resulting in the destruction of five union branches and the arrest of twenty-three worker cadres. In August of the same year, the CCP central committee planned to organize an armed uprising in Wuhan, the result of which was the massacre of more than 100 members of the CCP Wuhan city committee and the Yangzi Bureau (Changjiang Ju), the CCP's leading organ in Central China. On the eve of the insurrection, there were in Wuhan only about 100 CCP members, 80 members of the Youth League and 100 red union members. It was apparently unrealistic that the CCP attempted to use such a small force to initiate a revolt in a major Nationalist power base. 237 The radical policies continued to wreck the red union movement in the rest of the first half of 1930s. According to an estimate by the CCP-led All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the number of red union members in the "white areas" decreased from 49,821 in June 1930 to about 3,000 in February 1933. Even the ACFTU itself was forced to retreat from the "white area" to the "Soviet area". 238

The failure of the CCP in carrying out the "red" trade

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238 Wang Yongxi et al., Zhongguo gonghui shi, pp. 205, 209.
union movement in the Nationalist-controlled areas should be primarily accounted for by the Party's "Left opportunist" line or policies. The major pitfall of this line, as it was applied to the worker movement, lay in that it neglected the distinction between the trade union as a social organization and the CCP as a political party and its advocacy, implicit or explicit, of substitution of party organizations for the trade union. Under the "Left opportunist" line in the early 1930s, the CCP treated workers and trade unions not as an ally, but largely as a part or even an appendage of the party; and the Party attempted to impose its own will of conducting "armed uprisings" for seizure of political power on trade unions, while ignoring the latter's unique function of representing and protecting workers' immediate economic interests. I am not suggesting that workers lacked political consciousness and that they were indifferent to political affairs. What I attempt to emphasize is that workers in the "white areas" simply could not embrace and fight for the CCP's abstract political ideas or slogans. First, it was hard for the workers to see any identification of these communist ideas with their own interests and to figure out what benefits they could gain from the CCP's political struggle and its success in winning state power. In other words, the CCP had yet to convince workers that the political struggle would bring immediate improvement in workers' conditions. Secondly, workers in the
"white area" had every reason to doubt the ability of the CCP, a small band of "red bandits", or "outlaws" or at least "adventurists" (as they were known in the Nationalist-controlled areas) to seize the state power from the GMD, the only "legitimate" and powerful national authority the workers knew. Even if the workers recognized the CCP’s legitimacy and regarded its endorsement of political struggle as justifiable, they would still feel reluctant to join such a struggle, which required enormous sacrifice and whose fate was uncertain under the rampant anti-communist "white terror" of the Nationalist regime. To further illustrate this point, I would refer to a story about the Meiya Silk Company told by Zhang Qi in his memoirs. Zhang was an underground CCP member in charge of the labor movement in the Meiya Silk Company in Shanghai in the 1930s. One day in April 1934, Zhang and a leading member, "Comrade Liu", from the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) (Shanghai gonghui lianhehui—the CCP’s leading organ of Shanghai’s worker movement), secretly called a meeting of about fifty worker "activists" from No. 6 Factory of the Meiya Company. At the meeting, "Comrade Liu" explained the "red unions’ political stand of supporting the CCP and establishing the Soviet power". He also asked workers to "unite under the CCP’s leadership" and to "keep up strikes". Finally, "Comrade Liu" announced that all the workers at the meeting were being recruited into the red union. The worker activists, however,
proved unprepared and perplexed by this. Many of them could not help disclosing that they were afraid of joining the red union. After the meeting, no one ever liked to mention it. As far as most workers were concerned, the red unions only served as an instrument of the CCP for political struggle rather than a champion of their own interests. Even the CCP itself later admitted that the red unions in the "white areas" "did not really become unions of the broad masses of the people". Under such circumstances, the CCP could not but fail in its effort to expand "red" trade unions.

The inclination of the CCP under the "Left opportunist line" to treat "red" trade unions as the Party’s appendage or instrument also, to some extent, shaped the Party’s attitude toward "yellow" trade unions. Generally, the CCP held a dogmatic view of the yellow unions and indiscriminately identified them as an appendage of the Nationalist regime and a tool of the Nationalist state to cheat and manipulate workers and to neutralize the worker movement. It failed to realize that the "yellow" unions under the Nationalist regime were characterized by diversity and that many of them, even

239 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi (A record of Shanghai’s worker movement), p. 30.

though they registered with the Nationalist state or nominally accepted the latter's leadership, often played the role of a champion of workers' interests and actively got involved in such activities as worker strikes. For this, some "yellow" trade unions were even forced by the Nationalist regime to close down. 241 It was primarily because of their willingness to champion workers' interests that many "yellow" unions were well accepted by workers. Usually utilitarian and primarily concerned with economic benefits, workers often entertained the hope that their economic betterment could be achieved through the "legitimate" channel of "yellow" unions. In Qingdao, for example, many workers, especially those with decent jobs and stable incomes (workers at the railway, electricity industry, post office, and telephone companies) chose to join the GMD or yellow unions organized by the GMD's left wing, the Reorganization Faction of the GMD (Guomindang gaizupai). 242 By May 1932, two-thirds of the city's 30,000

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242 "Ding Junyang tan Shandong qingxing" (Ding Junyang [head of organizational department of CCP Shandong provincial committee before March of 1929] talks about Shandong's situation); "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu gongyundong zhuangkuang de baogao" (CCP Shandong provincial committee's report on workers' movement), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 26-37, 38-40.
workers joined "yellow" unions. In 1933, there were 3,101 yellow trade unions with 971,510 members in the Nationalist-controlled areas (while there were only about 3,000 red union members as of February 1933). Partly out of its ignorance or underestimation of such a popular basis of the "yellow" unions, the CCP ruled out the possibility that red unions could ally with them. Instead, it adopted a hostile attitude toward "yellow" unions and strongly advocated their destruction. In so doing, the CCP not only deprived itself of the right to engage in "lawful struggle" under the camouflage of "yellow" unions, but also alienated the workers within the "yellow" unions.

Although the CCP, with its poor tactics, failed in expanding "red" trade unions, it still exerted great influence on the fate of workers in the Nationalist-controlled areas in the first half of the 1930s. The very existence of the CCP as a rival political party and its activities among workers posed a serious challenge to the Nationalist state. The latter, to offset the communist influence on workers and to forestall

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243 "Guomindang zhongyang xunlianbu Zhang Hanqiu deng diaocha Qingdao gongyun qingkuang zong baogaoshu" (An investigation report by Zhang Hanqiu and others from People's Training Department of GMD Central Committee on Qingdao's labor unrest) (May 20, 1932), in Zhonghua minguo shi dangan ziliao huibian (Compilation of archival materials on the history of Republic of China), v. 5, pt. 1, no. 3, pp. 392-400.

244 Wang Yongxi et al., Zhongguo gonghui shi, p. 218.
their turning to the alliance with the CCP, had to consider the interests of workers' and make concessions to them. The CCP may be correct that the Trade Union Regulation promulgated by the Nationalist government "almost copied the Shanghai workers' economic demands raised by the (Communist-led) Shanghai General Trade Union". In its attempt to entice workers to join it, members of the Reorganization Faction in Qingdao reminded workers that "we have raised the same requests (for workers) as the Communists; while we can work openly, the Communists have to risk their lives". So "many workers seemed to have become obsessed" with the Reorganization Faction and "run to its side". Apparently, the Nationalist regime, whether its central government under Chiang Kai-shek or its left wing (the Reorganization Faction), did have the CCP's challenge in mind when coming to appease workers and allow a space for "yellow" unions. This partly explained why the "yellow" unions under the Nationalist rule could maintain some popular character: a result of the Nationalists' concession to workers in the face of the


246 "Ding Junyang tan Shandong qingxing" (Ding Junyang talks about Shandong's situation); "Zhonggong Shandong shengwei guanyu gongyun zhuangkuang de baogao" (CCP Shandong provincial committee's report on workers' movement), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 3, pp. 26-37, 38-40.
Communist challenge. For workers, the CCP, as a political party, constituted a possible alternative to the GMD and provided them with more room to manoeuvre. Of course, they did not necessarily feel compelled to favor the CCP or the Communist-led red trade unions for the reasons discussed in this section. Far from a passive societal force, workers had a good sense of where their interests lay and could resist the temptation of political parties' propaganda that sound nice but was unrealistic.

As far as the CCP was concerned, it learned a bitter lesson from its failure in conducting "red union movement": the Party could not treat workers and their organizations simply as a partisan instrument and dictate to them; rather it must see them as an ally and pay particular attention to their distinct interests in order to win their sympathy. Such a perception helped drive the CCP to change, around 1935\1936, its previous radical tactic and to formulate a new one, which would contribute significantly to the CCP's final victory over its major rival, the GMD.

3. Resumption of the Alliance of the Party and Trade Unions, 1936-1949
The title of this section means that after suffering severe setbacks in the early 1930s, the CCP resumed, during 1936--1949, the kind of alliance (or partnership) with workers and trade unions it once enjoyed in the warlord era. The turning point was the Zunyi Conference in January of 1935,
which formally put an end to the domination of the "Left opportunist line" under Wang Ming and established the leadership of Mao Zedong within the CCP. This was also a moment of national crisis with the Japanese rapidly penetrating Northern China. In December of 1935, the CCP formulated the strategy of "national united front against Japan", which sought collaboration with all other forces including the GMD, its former enemy, for resisting the Japanese invasion. It was against this background that the CCP began to systematically rethink its past experience in the "white area" and to change its tactics of undertaking the worker movement there. In this process, Liu Shaoqi played an important and unique role.

Liu had long been the major Communist leader and expert working in the "white area". In the fall of 1931, he was appointed concurrently head of the CCP Central Committee's Labor Department and secretary of the (Communist) party and Youth League within the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (quanguo zonggonghui dangtuan shuji). These important positions and his rich experience of underground work, however, did not guarantee Liu a say in making policies on the worker movement, which were dictated by the CCP Politburo under Wang Ming, Qin Bangxian, and Zhang Wentian, major representatives of the "Left opportunist line". From the outset, Liu Shaoqi unequivocally expressed his objection to
this line. He argued that the time was simply not ripe for workers to take the offensive or to engage "political struggle" or "armed uprisings" in the early 1930s inasmuch as the reactionary forces were too strong. Instead, the labor movement should first be concerned with workers' most pressing demands (wage increases, distribution of bonuses). Liu also insisted that Communists should exploit "legal struggle", and particularly, capitalize on "yellow" unions. Meanwhile, he suggested that the red union was not an appropriate and effective way to establish wide contact with workers in the context of Nationalist "white terror". 247 In January of 1932, when some Communists withdrew from the "yellow" union in the Dadong Press (Dadong shuju) in Shanghai, Liu criticized this act as abandoning the masses within the "yellow" union, reasserting that Communists should join any yellow unions as long as there were workers in them. 248 At the end of December of 1931, the Nationalist Shanghai authorities closed down the "yellow" trade union in Yongan NO. 2 Cotton Mill in Shanghai and arrested some of its leaders for their leading a strike (for bonuses). The Communist-led All-China Federation of Trade

247 Chen Shaochou, Liu Shaoqi zai baigu (Liu Shaoqi in the "white area"), pp. 87-88, 92, 99.

Unions (ACFTU) made a statement, only expressing its support for workers' demands for bonuses. Liu Shaoqi held that the ACFTU's position was unsatisfactory and that it should further raise such slogans as "no arrest of workers" and "no close-down of trade unions by the GMD", albeit these unions' "yellow" nature. The point was that the GMD violated the workers' right and freedom to form trade unions. 249

 Apparently, Liu Shaoqi differed from the CCP's Central Committee under "Left opportunism" on what tactics should be pursued in undertaking the worker movement in the "white area". Liu's deviation from the Central policy-makers incurred him disgrace. From February to April of 1932, Liu Shaoqi was subjected to severe criticism by the CCP Central Committee for committing the following mistakes: pessimistic assessment of the revolutionary situation and the possibility of red union movement, "surrender to yellow unions", "economist and syndicalist" deviations (emphasis on workers' economic interests and on trade unions' distinction from the Party). As a result, Liu lost his position as head of the CCP Central Committee's Labor Department and was transferred to the Communist-led Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions. 250


Liu Shaoqi's day finally came with the downfall of the CCP's "Left opportunist" leadership in 1935. In December of that year, Liu was appointed by the new CCP Central Committee as its representative in the Northern Bureau to lead party work North China. In the two years of 1936 and 1937, Liu wrote a series of articles, summing up "lessons" of the Communist-led labor movement in the "white area" and outlining new tactics for the movement. Liu Shaoqi identified the party's tactic of red unions in the early 1930s as "adventurism and closed-doorism" (guanmen zhuyi, which meant exclusively focusing on expansion of red unions while rejecting cooperation with yellow unions) and attributed to it the failure of the CCP's work in the Nationalist-controlled areas. Liu suggested that the main problem with this tactic was "commandism": the CCP set forth "platforms" or "slogans" that were beyond the understanding or interest of workers and forced the latter to follow; and the party even made statements "in the name of mass organizations without the latter's agreement". Commandism only worked to scare away the masses and isolate the Party.

In criticizing "adventurism and closed-doorism", Liu Shaoqi took pains to advocate the following principles for the

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251 Liu Shaoqi, "Suqing guanmen zhuyi yu maoxian zhuyi" (To eliminate closed-doorism and adventurism) (April 10, 1936), in Liu Shaoqi xuanji (Selected works of Liu Shaoqi), vol. 1, pp. 23-33.
labor movement in the "white area". (1) The CCP's main task in "key cities and industrial centers" was to "win over the majority of the working class and accumulate strength" for a "decisive struggle in the future" rather than "at present"; (2) Communists should concentrate on daily struggles, which were directly related to workers' immediate interests, and make sure to win each struggle. Particularly, they should take advantage of the Nationalist Factory Law and Trade Union Law and lead workers to struggle for the realization of those provisions in favor of workers; (3) The Communists should try to exploit the "legal" means in conducting the trade union work. First, they should "immediately abolish the previously-formed secret red trade unions" and temporarily give up the effort to establish such unions. Secondly, the Communists should join all yellow unions and participate in their various activities, thereby uniting workers and organizing their struggles. Within yellow unions, Communists should attempt to gain every leadership position through election. Even if Communists managed to control a certain yellow union's leadership, there was no need to change it into a red union. Instead, they should "leave this yellow union intact on the surface", for example, notifying the GMD of union meetings and allowing Nationalists to attend these meetings. Thirdly, in those factories with no yellow unions, Communists should exploit other forms of mass organization such as native-place
association, mutual-aid society and abstinence society. In addition, they should seek chance to openly set up trade unions among unorganized workers (workers who were outside both yellow unions and other organizations) "according to the procedures provided by the Nationalist regime's Trade Union Law" (e.g., registration with the Nationalist authorities and claiming to accept the Nationalist guidance), although this could be "very unpleasant" for Communists; 252 (4) Successful adoption of these tactics required a redefinition of the relationship between the CCP and the masses or mass organizations. The Party needed to overcome commandism and "pay respect to the organizational autonomy of mass organizations and the masses' democratic rights and opinions". 253 "Organizationally", the Party must "acknowledge the equality between itself and every popular organization" rather than regard the latter as "an appendage of the Party" or an "official-controlled organization". "Any popular organizations with no autonomy and freedom could not play their proper role"; the party would come into conflict with popular

252 Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu baiqu zhigong yundong de tigang" (An outline on workers' movement in the white area) (April 1936), in Liu Shaoqi xuanji (Selected works of Liu Shaoqi), vol. 1, pp. 34-40.

253 Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu baiqu de dang he qunzhong gongzuo" (On party and mass work in the white area) (May 1937), in Liu Shaoqi xuanji (Selected works of Liu Shaoqi), vol. 1, pp. 55-71.
organizations if it attempted to force them into its subordinates. The party may try to persuade mass organizations to "voluntarily" accept its political views, but must avoid demanding their direct obedience to the party's orders. "We (Communists) should appear among the masses as a member of them and raise our views and measures that the masses can voluntarily follow rather than come to order and command them in the capacity of a Communist member or self-appointed leader". "Whether a party member can become the masses' leader does not depend upon legal provisions or the party's appointment, but upon whether he is able to understand the masses and to faithfully fight for their interests through self-sacrifice".

Liu Shaoqi went further, in 1939, to elaborate how the CCP should promote popular organizations, using the concept of "the people's self-motivation" (minzhong de zidongxing). He defined it as the inclination or ability of the people, dynamic and with thinking, to actively make known their wishes and demands based on realities. Liu emphasized that the CCP, as a political party, must fully understand and follow such

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255 Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu baiqu de dang he qunzhong gongzuo", in Liu Shaoqi xuanji (Selected works of Liu Shaoqi), vol. 1, pp. 55-71.
self-motivation and consider the people's interests as the first priority to successfully form mass organizations. To realize the people's demands was the "objective of forming popular organizations". Only those organizations that were formed in conformity with the "automatism of the people" could be regarded as "authentic popular organizations". Only with the confidence and support of such organizations could the CCP gain the upper hand in competing with its rivals. 256

The keynote of these remarks by Liu Shaoqi was that the CCP needed to treat popular organizations including trade unions as equal partners or allies rather than as subordinates. This perception derived primarily from Liu's personal and the Party's experience of working in the "white area", as suggested above. It was also a response to the national crisis brought on by the Japanese invasion. With the outbreak of the all-out Sino-Japanese war, the CCP found a new and more powerful enemy in the Japanese and needed more urgently the alliance of various groups of people. Moreover, the emerging "united front" between the CCP and the GMD, fragile it may be, made it possible for the Communists to undertake "legal struggles", especially by utilizing those

popular organizations under the Nationalist influence such as "yellow" unions.

Despite the initial opposition from some CCP leaders, Liu's opinions on the relations between the CCP and popular organizations in general and on the Party's tactics of conducting the worker movement in the "white area" in particular eventually prevailed within the CCP's central leadership and especially gained the support of Mao Zedong, the Party's new top leader. At the conference on the Party's work in the "white area", which convened from May 17 to June 10, 1937, Mao rejected the criticisms of Liu Shaoqi made by some former "Left opportunist" leaders of the CCP and confirmed that Liu's views were basically correct. He also acknowledged that Liu knew well the "dialectics of concrete work" (shiji gongzuo de bianzhengfa), had "rich mass work experience", and almost made no mistakes in doing the mass work. In the meantime, Liu's views were incorporated into a

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257 Dangshi yanjiu ziliao (Materials for the study of the Party history) (Beijing, 1989), no. 9, p. 407.

258 Zou Pei and Liu Zhen, Zhongguo gongren yundong shi, vol. 3, pp. 408-409. Also see Dangshi yanjiu ziliao, no. 9 (1989). Liu Shaoqi made a great contribution to the emergence of what Mark Selden identified as the Yenan way in the late 1930s and early 1940s, which ultimately led to the communist victory in China. See Mark Selden, The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China (Harvard University Press, 1972).
major CCP document and became the guidelines for the Communist-led worker movement in the enemy (Japanese)-occupied areas and the "white area" (the Nationalist-controlled areas) during the period between 1937 and 1949.

In the pages that follow I first trace briefly the Communist-led union activities during the anti-Japanese war and then focus on the CCP's competition with the GMD regime in controlling trade unions since 1945. In both cases, I primarily refer to Shanghai and Qingdao as examples to illustrate how the CCP exploited the new tactics stated above.

The Wartime CCP-led Labor Movement, 1937-1945

The Sino-Japanese war proved to be a critical moment for the CCP to expand its influence among workers in urban centers that were under the Japanese threat or occupation. The wartime situation allowed the CCP to well exploit worker nationalism in organizing workers. Moreover, the approaching Japanese occupation forced the Nationalists, their troops and administrators including those in charge of labor affairs, to evacuate major cities and thus removed a check on some underground Communists, who were engaged in secret worker organizing. During the early wartime (1937 and 1938), the

259 The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), "Guanyu zhigong yundong de jingyan ji zhuangbian fangshi wenti" (On the experience of labor movement and change in tactics) (1937), in Qingdao dangshi ziliao, vol. 6, pp. 31-40.
Communists in Shanghai, taking advantage of workers' anti-Japanese feelings and in the name of salvaging the nation, rushed to form various worker organizations. Among them were the Cotton Mill Workers' Association for Salvation (shachang gongren jiuwang xiehui), the Wartime National Service Society (guomin zhanshi fuwu tuan, August 1937) involving workers from silk, flour, textile, and machinery industries in eastern Shanghai, the Printing Industry Wartime Service Society (yinshua jie zhanshi fuwu tuan, August 1937), the Youth Salvation Society of Southern Shanghai (hunan qingnian jiuwang tuan, August 1937), the Rickshaw Pullers' Association for Salvation (renli chefu jiuwang xiehui, October 1937), the Postal Branch of the Association of the Employed for Salvation (zhiye jie jiuwang xiehui youzheng zu, October 1937). These organizations emerged on the eve of the Nationalists' retreat from Shanghai and the Japanese occupation of the city (November 1937). They were engaged in various activities such as anti-Japanese propaganda, taking in wounded Chinese soldiers, housing refuges, and providing services for the unemployed workers, who were dislocated by the widespread disruption of production rendered by the Japanese bombing. Although ceasing to function openly when the Japanese occupied Shanghai in November 1937, these organizations did leave a legacy: they had instilled a spirit of solidarity into workers; and their members remained in factories, waiting for
opportunities to instigate workers. In January 1938, the Communists managed to set up a leading organ for the worker movement, the Shanghai Workers' Association for Salvation (SWAS) (Shanghai gongren jiuwang xiehui), which existed till 1949 (its name changed to Shanghai Workers' Association since 1946). The CCP once tried to form such a general worker organization as soon as the all-out Sino-Japanese war broke out (1937), but was foiled in its attempt by the GMD, which already sponsored a similar organization, the Association of Labor Circles for Salvation (gongjie jiuwang xiehui). It was in the turmoil consequent upon the Nationalists' withdrawal and the upcoming of the Japanese occupiers that the CCP was able to organize the Shanghai Workers' Association for Salvation (SWAS) under its own leadership. 260

During the formal Japanese occupation of Shanghai, the Communists there continued to work among workers and build the popular basis for its power. Given the tight control by the Japanese and their Chinese collaborators, the Communists adopted the "defensive" tactic of "hiding" (among the masses), "preserving and accumulating strength", and "waiting for a chance for action". Following this tactic, the Communists placed emphasis on "widely making friends" and "protecting the masses' immediate interests" by using various "legitimate"

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Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi (A record of Shanghai's worker movement), pp. 57-61.
They actively sought cooperation from non-Communist organizations such as the Shanghai Local Association (SLA) (Shanghai difang xiehui) headed by Du Yuesheng, the Green Gang chieftain. In the spring of 1938, Du retreated to Hong Kong and left the SLA's routine work to his associate Yao Huiquan. Through personal connections, the Communist-led Shanghai Workers' Association for Salvation (SWAS) established contact with Yao and gained the SLA's financial assistance—a monthly donation of 200 yuan for building and sustaining a workers' school. Secretly, the SWAS spent part of the money on publishing a labor magazine. The Communists also tried to unite workers through various existing "legitimate" friendship societies and clubs. For instance, they penetrated the printing industry's friendship society, the Chinese Workers' Club at the Customs (haiguan huayuan julebu), the Professional Women's Club (zhiye funu julebu), the Money Industry's friendship society (yinqian ye lianyihui), the Chinese Clerk's Club in Foreign Firms (yanghang huayuan jule bu), the Self-governing Societies (zizhi hui) in Yongan Cotton Mill and Fufeng Flour Factory, the mutual aid societies (huzhu hui) in

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261 Wang Raoshan, "Weida jinian ri yiqi de huiyi" (Reminiscences on the great commemoration day), in *Shanghai wenshi ziliao* (Literary and historical materials on Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), no. 50, pp. 22-33.

the British Tramway Company and French Tramway Company, the consumers' cooperatives (xiaofei hezudoshe) of postal workers and workers in Shanghai Electrical Company, as well as many worker schools. The alleged purposes of these societies were to establish friendly contacts and conduct recreational activities and academic studies. Under the wartime circumstances, however, they also developed, more or less, a political (anti-Japanese) tone. Some of them participated in such activities as making donations for the Chinese war efforts initiated by underground Communists in 1938 and 1939. 263

Despite their strong anti-Japanese sentiment, the underground Communists in Shanghai did not see organizing anti-Japanese activities as their primary task in the early years of Japanese occupation (before the Pearl Harbor Incident, December 8, 1941). Instead, they focused on "economic struggles" for improvement of workers' livelihood with capitalists, especially those in the concessions (British and French) as their main targets. The Communists intended to expand their influence among workers through these "struggles". As the CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee

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Zhang Chengzong, "Kangzhan banian de Shanghai dixia douzheng" (The underground struggle in Shanghai during the eight years of anti-Japanese war), in Shanghai wenshi ziliao (Literary and historical materials on Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), no. 50, pp. 1-21; Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 78.
(Communist organizations in Shanghai were under its leadership) instructed in a directive on launching the "livelihood improvement movement" on June 18, 1939, the economic struggle should not be conducted simply for the sake of livelihood, nor for destroying the forces of "Chinese traitors", but for consolidating and strengthening the Party's popular basis. 

Apparently, it was self-preservation that motivated Communists to endorse the improvement of workers' conditions.

The Communists' concern with economic struggles was reinforced by their proper assessment of the workers' situation in the concessions. When the Japanese occupied Shanghai, they, out of diplomatic considerations, did not immediately put the concessions under Japanese jurisdiction, but allowed them to continue to function until the Pearl Harbour Incident (December 8, 1941). Surrounded by Japanese-occupied areas, these concessions were like islands in the sea. (It is common to refer to the years from November 1937 when Japanese entered Shanghai to December 1941 when they seized the concessions as the "period of the isolated island"-"gudao shiqi"). During this period, the concessions' economy experienced an unusual boom because of the influx of large amounts of capital and labor from the war zones. Workers' living conditions, however, not only did not improve, but

264 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 95.
deteriorated largely due to runaway inflation, which stemmed from merchants' hoarding and profiteering. Compared to the second half of 1936, the living cost increased by three times by late 1939. On the other hand, workers' wages did not grow correspondingly. Worse still, wage rates even tended to lower with some employers ready to take advantage of the abundant surplus labor provided by war refugees. Under such circumstances, the Communists in Shanghai deemed it necessary to take the initiative to mobilize workers for the economic struggle and thereby gain the workers' confidence.

In instigating economic struggles, the Communists in Shanghai tactfully exploited the contradiction between Japanese occupiers and the concessions. Even though the Japanese did not formally take over the concessions, they did attempt to penetrate these "isolated islands" for the purpose of acquiring war materials and foreign exchange. One tactic the Japanese used was, in the name of "yellow people against white people", to incite labor unrest in the concessions in order to put pressure on the concessions' administrative authorities, forcing them to make concessions to the Japanese. In 1940, the Japanese-sponsored Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU) (Shanghai shi zonggonghui), which was founded by Japan's Chinese collaborators (Wang Jingwei's people) in May 265

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of 1939, set up a branch union in the French Tramway Company despite the strong opposition from the French. It enticed workers to join the branch union with subsidies, free transportation, food and accommodation and free entertainment. Workers proved to be interested in joining the union not so much in support of the Japanese rule as for the goals of improving their own economic conditions: they expected the union to bargain with the French management for terms in favor of themselves. As far as the underground Communists were concerned, they initially attempted to dissuade workers from joining this Chinese traitor-sponsored union. Failing in this effort, they turned to use the union, infiltrating and waiting for an opportunity to seize the union's leadership. Eventually, the Communists succeeded in winning over the union's deputy director, Zhou Guoqiang, an old worker with wide connections and support from workers. 266

The chance came for the Communists when the Japanese-installed Shanghai authorities, in September of 1940, decided to launch a large-scale strike at the concessions' public utilities sector. The CCP's party branch in the French Tramway Company was not only ready to participate in the strike, but also worked out sixteen demands (primarily concerning workers' immediate interests such as wage increases and recognition of

trade union's legitimacy by the management) as the strike's objectives and let Zhou Guoqiang (the pro-Communist deputy director of the Japanese-sponsored trade union in the French company) read them to workers. Meanwhile, twelve Communists managed to infiltrate the twenty-one-member strike committee, by availing themselves of the occasion when the representative from the Japanese-sponsored Shanghai authorities, at the suggestion of Zhou Guoqiang, decided to expand the size of the committee. The strike, involving 1,700 workers and clerks of the French Tramway Company, lasted twenty-seven days and came to conclusion with the French accepting seven of the sixteen conditions and promising to consider the rest after work resumed. At the end of the strike, the Communists virtually controlled the French Tramway Company union and gained a large following among workers. 267

The interplay of the concessions, the Japanese or Japanese-backed Shanghai authorities, and the Communists benefitted the worker movement, which, instead of subsiding, seemed to have intensified until the Japanese occupation of the concessions. In 1939 and 1940, labor unrest (strikes and slowdowns) took place in more than 400 enterprises. According to the statistics of the Municipal Council, 286 and 329

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strikes occurred in 1940 and 1941 respectively, mostly in the concessions (201 in 1940 and 283 in 1941). 268

The situation of Shanghai's labor movement changed with the Japanese takeover of the concessions in December of 1941. The Japanese no longer needed labor unrest to sabotage the rule of their Western rivals (Americans, British and French). Accordingly, they changed their tactic of sponsoring labor unrest to suppression. The Japanese could not even tolerate the trade unions (amounting to 170) under their Chinese collaborators (the pro-Japanese Shanghai authorities), most of which were forced to suspend their function. In face of the high-handed Japanese policies, underground Communists in Shanghai lay more stress on the necessity of "hiding" themselves, "avoiding open mass struggles", and preserving the party's strength, under the catch-words "safety first", "eluding the enemy's attack is itself a kind of struggle against the enemy". 269 In the next three and half years, the underground Communists busied themselves with "building the party" (recruiting workers into the Party) and penetrating into key industries or sectors such as public utilities, transportation and communications, railway, machinery, shipbuilding, and cotton mills. By the end of 1943, the number of

268 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, p. 96; Zou Pei and Liu Zhen, Zhongguo gongren yundong shi, vol. 4, p. 325.

269 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, p. 112.
Communists working for the labor movement increased to 500 from 100 in 1938. The Communists' quiet activities in expanding party organizations among workers laid the foundation for their vigorous and successful competition with the GMD for control of trade unions in the ensuing Civil War years.

The Communists in Qingdao generally followed the same defensive tactics as in Shanghai, namely, hiding among workers and relying on workers' voluntary societies to secretly develop party organizations and waiting for chances to instigate workers for "economic struggles" (primarily slowdowns). Compared with their counterparts in Shanghai, Qingdao's Communists faced more difficulties in carrying out the labor movement. Firstly, no parallel anti-Japanese military actions were undertaken in Qingdao on the eve of the Japanese occupation. Qingdao's Nationalist administrative and military personnel simply deserted the city four days before the coming of Japanese forces on December 23, 1937. Thus, workers of Qingdao were not as mobilized by formal resistance movement as in Shanghai. Moreover, in Qingdao there existed no Western concessions, which Communists could exploit to mobilize workers. In addition, the Japanese occupants in Qingdao took more precautions against the Chinese labor movement, particularly stationing heavy military forces.

270Ibid., pp. 81, 119.
(marines and military police) around all major Japanese-owned factories and imposing the baojia system on people in the industrial districts. Such measures were partly a response to the Nationalists' "scorched earth policy"--the Nationalists in Qingdao, before retreating, destroyed all nine Japanese cotton mills, an electricity plant, water supply facilities, and harbor equipment. After rebuilding these industries, the Japanese became particularly concerned to prevent further sabotage from the Chinese workers, Communists or Nationalists. Despite close Japanese supervision, Qingdao's underground Communists managed to set up party branches in some major enterprises including Japanese-owned firms. They led five small-scale strikes and slowdowns for improvement of workers' economic conditions and encouraged workers to sabotage the production of Japanese enterprises by such means as loafing on the job, theft, waste, and damaging equipment. 271

The CCP-GMD Contest for Control of Trade Unions, 1945-1949

The post-war years (1945-1949) can be identified as a golden period of the Communist-led worker movement in Shanghai and Qingdao. Although still not state power-holders and facing the intermittent purge of the Nationalist authorities, the Communists in these cities had more leverage or advantages

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Qingdao gongren yundongshi (A history of Qingdao's labor movement), pp. 227-269.
than their Nationalist rivals in gaining the workers' support and in organizing trade unions. Specifically, Communists benefitted from the unique urban situation (e.g., an initial absence of Nationalist power, widespread discontent among workers over unemployment and inflation) in the aftermath of the anti-Japanese war; and they had become more mature and tactful in dealing with the Nationalist regime, especially in taking advantage of the latter's weaknesses as a state power-holder.

As suggested in the last section, the Nationalists retreated from Shanghai when the Japanese started occupation of the city. They remained in the rear area, when the Japanese announced their surrender on August 15, 1945. Once back in Shanghai, Nationalist bureaucrats were preoccupied with recovering property from the Japanese and struggling for party and government positions, while passing over labor issues for the time being. By contrast, Communists had stayed underground in Shanghai and managed to infiltrate workers during the wartime. With the end of war, they surfaced and rushed to develop trade unions with little opposition partly by exploiting the "power vacuum" in the area of labor. The Communists were particularly active in Japanese-owned enterprises, where they openly registered workers and organized trade unions or union preparatory committees and workers' pickets. The Communists went further to unite the
enterprise-level unions into trade union federations across different enterprises and industries. Among them were a trade union federation of the light, heavy, and textile industries, which involved sixty-three factories and 50,000 workers, and the Federation of Unemployed Workers in Western Shanghai with about 50,000 workers from thirty-five enterprises. The Communists also succeeded in reorganizing some trade unions previously under the Japanese-sponsored Shanghai authorities, including the French Tramway Company and British Tramway Company unions. During the first post-war year (August 15, 1945 to August 15, 1946), there emerged in Shanghai about 300 trade unions, most of them under Communist influence. Thus, the CCP gained the upper hand in Shanghai's labor movement in the early post-war era. Wu Kaixian, director of the Bureau of Social Affairs of the Nationalist Shanghai government, acknowledged that the Nationalist "Party's basis among workers had collapsed" during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai; and the party was slow to rebuild such a basis after the war ended, whereas the Communists were "rising in swarms", "penetrating the grassroots level" and "instigating labor movements", threatening to shake the Nationalist power.

Another senior Nationalist leader in charge of labor affairs

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272 Zhang Qi, *Shanghai gongyun jishi*, p. 163.

(Ma Chaojun) also confirmed that the CCP cadres, who had infiltrated and hidden among Shanghai's workers during the anti-Japanese war, were "vigorously" carrying out their labor activities in the post-war years. 274

The Nationalist Shanghai authorities resorted to a variety of means to counteract the increasing communist influence on workers and particularly to neutralize Communist-led unions. They requested that all trade unions must register with the Bureau of Social Affairs; they assigned Nationalist party cadres to trade unions as "worker movement instructors" (gongyun zhidaoyuan) to supervise union activities or seize their leadership. Furthermore, the Nationalist city authorities exploited the tactic of "counterattacking organizations with organizations" (yizuzhiduizuzhi), setting up Nationalist-led "labor" institutions or unions to cope with their communist counterparts. Besides enterprise-level unions, Nationalists also set up, in the second half of 1946, two city-level labor-related organizations, the Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU) and the Shanghai Workers' Welfare Committee (SWWC) (Shanghai gongren fuli weiyuanhui). 275 The SWWC, whose original name was the

274 Cited in Shanghai dangshi (Shanghai's party history), no. 2 (1992), p. 35; Ma Chaojun et al., Zhongguo laogong yundong shi, vol. 4, p. 1567.

275 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, 164, 165; Shanghai dangshi (The history of the CCP in Shanghai), no. 2 (1992), p. 35.
Shanghai City Committee for Directing the Labor Movement, Party Organizations and (Youth) Leagues (Shanghai shi gongyun dangtuan zhidao weiyuanhui), was more powerful than the SGTU and served as a major instrument for the Nationalists in Shanghai to combat Communist union activities. Its director was Lu Jingshi, concurrently director of the Organization and Training Office affiliated with the Department of Social Affairs of the GMD Central Committee (Guomindang zhongyang shehuibu zuxun si). The Committee consisted of sixty-one senior members and another 6,153 cadres, who usually were enterprise-level union leaders and heads of the armed "Industrial Protection Brigade" (huqong dui). The latter was the SWWC’s subordinate organ, with about 9,000 members being organized into nineteen large teams and stationed in major enterprises. The SWWC’s specific functions included "training" union leaders, developing Nationalist party organizations among workers, espionage on Communist-led labor movement. Lu Jingshi requested that all trade union leaders join the-SWWC and the GMD, intending to squeeze Communists out of union leadership and create confusions among workers toward the CCP.

As far as the Communists were concerned, they adopted it as a basic policy to avoid head-on confrontation with the

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Shanghai dangshi, no. 2 (1992), p. 33-36; Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 177-178.
Nationalists, while trying to foil the latter's above manoeuvres by roundabout tactics or "legal struggle". Specifically, the Communist-led unions, on the instruction of the CCP's secret leadership in Shanghai, generally registered with the Nationalist Shanghai authorities and pretended to accept the latter's leadership. Under the "legal" cover, they pursued "illegal" activities, particularly inciting worker activism. Moreover, the Communists did not bluntly oppose the Nationalist regime's attempt to assign "labor movement instructors" to unions. What they did was to discredit these people by linking them to the Nationalist bureaucrats' conspiracy and discouraged workers from electing them as union leaders.  

The Communists also exploited the contradictions with the Nationalist regime. For example, Lu Jingshi and Zhu Xuefan, director of the China Labor Association, had long

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278 Zhu was a senior leader of the Nationalist-led worker movement. Between 1927 and 1949, he assumed the following positions: member of the Standing Committee of Shanghai Postal Union and of the Standing Committee of All-China Federation of Post Unions, chairman of the Shanghai General Trade Union (1930s), and chairman of the Chinese Labor Association (from 1935 to 1949).

The China Labor Association (Zhongguo laogong xiehui) (1935-1949) was founded by such Nationalists as Tao Baichuan, Lu Jingshi, and Zhu Xuefan for "studying labor theories, building labor culture, and promoting labor's interests". Since 1937, it favored a policy of collaborating with the CCP and gradually came under the latter's influence. In the post-war years, the Association's relationship with the Nationalist regime rapidly deteriorated. In late 1946, Zhu was forced to move the Association's headquarters to Hong Kong.
been rivals in competing for power and influence in the field of labor movement. In the post-war era, they were in discord with each other particularly over the chairmanship of the Shanghai General Trade Union (SGTU). Zhu aspired for this position and was supposed to be the most appropriate candidate considering his background. However, Lu Jingshi favored one of his proteges to take the SGTU’s chairmanship and manoeuvred all resources at his disposal to block Zhu’s way, even inciting defection among Zhu’s followers. On their part, the Communists decided to back Zhu, who was sympathetic with the CCP, against Lu’s nominee Shui Xiangyun in the election. (For buying popular support, the GMD regime adopted election in selecting union leaders in the early post-war era, which the CCP labelled as sham democracy, but were ready to capitalize on it). Due to their enormous influence on grassroots-level unions, most union delegates voted for Zhu Xuefan as the SGTU’s chairman. Later on, Lu Jingshi arranged another "election" and managed to replace Zhu with a person of his own choice. By so doing, however, Lu and the Nationalist authorities seemed to have harmed their own image and earned the unsavory “anti-democracy” reputation. The Communists also applied this tactic of playing off one Nationalist faction

against another to their struggle for controlling enterprise-
level unions. For example, they succeeded in using Shao
Ziying, a protege of Du Yuesheng, to frustrate Lu Jingshi's
attempt to put his trusted follower Lu Keming into the
leadership of the French Tramway Company Union, one of the
most influential unions in Shanghai, and gradually gained
control of this union. The District 3 Cotton Textile Union
in western Shanghai was, on the eve of the Japanese surrender,
under the control of GMD secret agents. After the war, the
latter clashed with another group of Nationalists who were
dispatched by the GMD authorities to take over the union.
Exploiting such a contradiction within the Nationalists, ten
underground Communists got into the reorganized union
leadership, which consisted of a total of seventeen members.

Another technique the Communists used was to "infiltrate
the enemy's camp"--getting into the Nationalist-led union
organizations, basically in two ways. First, they actively
participated in the Nationalist-organized "democratic
election" of trade union leaders. Taking advantage of their
influence on workers, some CCP candidates squeezed into the
leadership of trade unions through election. For instance, six
Communists got elected as members of the Shanghai General

279 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 175-176, 330.
280 Wang Yongxi, Zhongguo gonghui shi, p. 304.
Trade Union's board of directors. Five underground Communists infiltrated into the District 3 Silk Industry Union, and four into the District 4 Mechanics Unions. The other way the Communists infiltrated Nationalist-led unions can be defined as passive. Take the Shanghai Workers' Welfare Committee (SWWC) for instance. As shown above, the SWWC's director Lu Jingshi attempted to recruit all trade unions' leaders into this committee or the Nationalist Party, expecting that the CCP members would either resist such an effort or voluntarily withdraw from the unions' leadership. In either case, the Communists would be exposed and then be eliminated. The CCP leaders in Shanghai (Liu Changsheng and Liu Xiao), however, decided to turn the GMD's "trick" against the GMD, instructing those Party members who worked as union leaders to follow the GMD's terms and join the GMD or the GMD-controlled SWWC. Before joining these Nationalist organizations, CCP members had to accept thorough scrutiny and approval from the CCP Shanghai branch, especially the Worker Movement Committee (gongren yundong weiyuanhui). By this means, nearly 200 Communists directly under the Committee penetrated the GMD and the SWWC around late 1946, dispersing in various industries and enterprises. Some of them were appointed by the GMD regime as trade union instructors or members of union standing

281 Wang Yongxi, op. cit., p. 304.

282 Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 176.
committees (gonghui changwu lishi). Under the cover of the GMD membership, these CCP members secretly engaged in anti-GMD activities. \(^{283}\)

These techniques, largely defensive by nature, represented the CCP's direct response to the GMD's efforts to sabotage the Communist-led trade unions. From the CCP's point of view, these techniques were especially useful in preserving their strength in face of the relatively strong and repressive Nationalist state power, but not enough to effectively undermine the latter's rule and ensure for the CCP predominant influence or control over trade unions, which was the primary goal of the CCP-led worker movement. For this purpose, Shanghai's Communists exploited another tactic: to mobilize workers and win their support by undertaking the economic struggle. Zhang Qi (secretary of the Worker Movement Committee in the 1940s) observed that most workers in Shanghai were more concerned with their economic interests than with politics; they would actively get involved in slowdowns and strikes for increasing personal economic benefits, but showed little interest in political activities such as demonstrations against the civil war. Therefore, the underground Communists in Shanghai, in striving for workers' support, deemed it necessary to cater to the needs of workers and take improvement of their economic conditions as a priority, while

\(^{283}\)Zhang Qi, op cit., pp. 177-179.
avoiding political slogans, which would otherwise provide excuses for GMD's suppression. In this regard, the CCP benefitted from the deplorable economic situations in the GMD-rulled regions including Shanghai.

In the whole period from 1945 to 1949, Shanghai's economy was characterized with depression or instability, from which workers particularly suffered. As early as the second half of 1945, following the Japanese surrender, all Japanese-owned or -managed enterprises in the city stopped operation, causing widespread unemployment. In the process of resuming these enterprises by Nationalists, a large amount of factory equipment and other materials were lost due to either theft or embezzlement by those in charge of the resumption, who in turn sold these materials rather than use them to restore production.

The economic recovery was also retarded by the rapid expansion of "bureaucratic capital" in the post-war era, which came to penetrate most key industries. By July of 1946, the Nationalist regime took over 2,411 enterprises from the enemy (the Japanese or their Chinese collaborators) and transformed them into state-owned ones. It went further to build many nationwide or regional monopoly firms. Largely because of their bureaucratic nature, these state enterprises proved economically inefficient. To make things worse, they hindered,

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284 Zhang Qi, op cit., p. 323, 149.
through unequal competition, the growth of private ("national capitalist"—minzu ziben) business and even edged many private enterprises into bankruptcy. The Chinese economy, especially the national industry, further suffered from foreign competition: the influx of large quantities of American goods. As of July of 1946, there were 115 American stores in Shanghai alone. Between 1946 and March of 1948, the value of imported American commodities reached one billion $US, accounting for sixty per cent of China's gross import value. China's trade deficit with the United States (800 million $US) made up seventy-seven per cent of the nation's total trade deficit. Unable to compete with American products, many private Chinese enterprises were forced to reduce production or close down, reinforcing the already serious problem of unemployment. 

Before any signs of economic recovery appeared, the GMD regime threw itself into the whirlpool of civil war with the CCP in June of 1946. To finance its war efforts and especially to make up the financial deficit stemming from the staggering military spending, the GMD regime resorted to reckless issuing of banknotes, which, in turn, led to runaway inflation and a deterioration of workers' living conditions. Compared to 1945, commodity prices in July of 1947 increased by eighty-nine times. Wage-earners, particularly workers, were main victims.

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of such inflation. Although initially (in 1946) the GMD Shanghai authorities were forced to cushion the negative effect of the inflation on the workers' livelihood by adopting cost-of-living index (which meant increasing wages in proportion to price growth) in setting wage rates, they deliberately lowered the index. In February of 1947, the GMD central government even decided to freeze the cost-of-living index regardless of the inflationary spiral, which adversely affected not only workers but also other wage-earners including public servants and staff and thus helped reinforce widespread social discontent.

The gloomy economic situation and widespread labor discontent prepared fertile soil for communist agitation among workers for "economic struggles" against the GMD regime. The underground Communists conducted agitation under the disguise of trade unions (rather than in the CCP's name) and under the pretext of fighting for workers' interests (instead of claiming political power for their party). Such communist agitation partly explained the high frequency and intensity of labor unrest over economic issues throughout the 1945-1949 period. In the first post-war year (August 1945-September

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286 Ibid., p. 901.

1946), incidents of labor unrest were primarily concerned with job security. Of the 1,920 labor disputes and strikes that occurred in Shanghai, 1,013 resulted from dismissal of workers and workers' anxiety for unemployment. Others were about improvement in treatment of workers and increase in wages and bonuses. The CCP-led trade unions often played a leading role in such labor unrest. It was also in instigating the labor unrest that the Party strengthened itself. From August of 1945 to the end of 1946, the CCP members working for the labor movement in Shanghai increased by 700, their total number reaching 1,600. Since the outbreak of the Civil War (June 1946), the Communist-led labor movement turned to focus on such problems as inflation and lowering of workers' real wages, which became a major concern for workers. Particularly, underground Communists initiated a citywide campaign for unfreezing the cost-of-living index in mid-1947. Various Communist-led unions went out to organize large-scale parades, demonstrations, rallies and presented petitions to the city authorities, demanding that the cost-of-living index be unfrozen and wages be increased to keep pace with the soaring of prices. Although the Nationalist regime suspected that Communists might be behind this campaign, it shied away from

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using violence against the unions and workers involved, for the latter's demands were economic rather than political in nature and left little room for violent suppression. Eventually, the GMD regime was forced to make concessions in May of 1947, announcing that the cost-of-living index would be unfrozen from that month. 289

A major Communist-incited labor unrest was the strike at the Shenxin No. 9 Cotton Mill for full payment of year-end bonuses in early 1948. In December of 1947, the Cotton Mill Owners' Association decided on a 20% reduction in workers' year-end bonuses and announced that the reduced bonuses would be paid at two different times. Leaders of the underground communist Worker Movement Committee realized that this was a good opportunity to assert their influence among workers by organizing a strike against the employers' encroachment on workers interests and that otherwise they would alienate workers. 290 Meanwhile, the Worker Movement Committee was confident in initiating and leading such a strike in the Shenxin No 9 Cotton Mill, for the Communist strength there was relatively strong: there were three party branches with about thirty party members in the mill. The strike started in


290 Shanghai gongyun shiliao (Historical materials on Shanghai's worker movement), no. 1 (1989), P. 22.
January 30, 1948. Besides full payment of bonuses, the strikers also raised other demands such as hiring those workers who had been dismissed "without reasons", abolishing "unreasonable" factory regulations, and maternity leave for women workers. 291 While the negotiation between strike representatives (including two Communists) and the management was under way, the GMD city authorities resorted to violent suppression on February 2, 1948, dispatching 1,000 policemen and even armoured vehicles to the mill. A clash between the police and workers happened, causing about 100 casualties on the labor side and the arrest of 236 workers. This was the so-called February Second Massacre. 292

As I suggested in describing the workers' campaign for unfreezing the cost-of-living index, the GMD authorities were usually tolerant of economic-oriented labor unrest. Then, why did they turn out to be so brutal toward the strike at the Shenxin No. 9 Cotton Mill, which was primarily concerned with protecting workers' material benefits? This had to do with the changes in the civil war situation and the upsurge of popular movements in GMD-controlled cities. Since late 1947, the GMD

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292 *Shanghai gongyun shiliao* (Historical materials on Shanghai's worker movement), no. 2 (1984), p. 28.
began to lose its military advantages in the battlefield \textit{vis-a-vis} the Communist forces, with the latter steadily strengthening themselves and turning their initial strategic defensive to offensive. Under such unfavorable military circumstances, the GMD regime became more concerned to consolidate its power base in the rear areas, where it faced increasing challenges from popular movements (students' and professionals' anti-war and anti-starvation demonstrations and worker strikes). In Shanghai, simultaneous with the Shenxin No. 9 Cotton Mill strike were two other popular movements: the dancers' protests against the GMD regime's prohibition of dancing \textsuperscript{293} and the "starvation-and-cold relief" campaign by students from the Tongji University, which evolved into a movement "for democracy and against persecution". The GMD regime feared that such popular campaigns, if unchecked, would spill to more industries and involve more people and

\textsuperscript{293} In late January of 1948, the GMD Shanghai government issued an order that dancing be forbidden, which enraged about 1,000 female dancers and other workers from twenty-six ballrooms in Shanghai. The dancers formed the Friendship Society of Female Dancers of Shanghai Women's Association (Shanghai shi funu hui wunu lianyi hui), campaigning for protecting their occupations from the government's infringement. On January 31, 1948, they held a meeting and then went to petition the Bureau of Social Affairs. When being refused a reception by the Bureau's head, the demonstrators rushed into the Bureau's office and did some damage to the office. Although the city authorities ordered the arrest about 500 demonstrators and dissolved the dancers' society, they were forced to withdraw the order that prohibited dancing. See Tang Zhenchang and Shen Hongchun, \textit{Shanghai shi} (A history of Shanghai), pp. 921-922.
eventually shake its rule. It even suspected that they might be actions taken by underground Communists in cooperation with the Communist military offensive. It was against this background that the GMD regime turned to the high-handed measures in dealing with the Shenxin No. 9 Cotton Mill strike. The military suppression of the strike by the GMD regime, however, provided another opportunity for communist agitation. The underground communist Worker Movement Committee set up the Support Committee on the February Second Massacre (Erqi canan houyuan hui) and made a statement condemning the GMD regime for its "anti-worker, anti-people" crimes and calling for support from other social strata. As a response, the Shanghai Mechanics’ Trade Union and unions in about 100 other industries and enterprises came to organize a committee for supporting the workers of Shenxi No. 9 Cotton Mill, collecting donations and exposing GMD regime’s atrocities. Under public pressure, the GMD city authorities formed a special committee to handle the case of the February Second Massacre and released most of the arrested workers. 294

There were parallel developments in Qingdao in terms of the GMD-CCP contest for controlling the labor movement. Following the Japanese surrender, the GMD Shangdong provincial authorities decided that all labor organizations within the

294 Zou Pei and Liu Zhen, Zhongguo gongren yundong shi, vol. 5, pp. 100-101; Zhang Qi, Shanghai gongyun jishi, pp. 228-229.
province should be reorganized in order to rid them of the communist influence and to forestall labor unrest and they dispatched "instructors" (zhidao yuan) and "specially appointed personnel" (tepai yuan) to major cities including Qingdao to help with reorganizing unions. Under their supervision, the GMD Qingdao city authorities (specifically the City Party Branch and the Bureau of Social Affairs) set up grassroots yellow unions in most major industries and a city-level union, the Qingdao General Trade Union (QGTU) early in 1946, and stipulated that the QGTU accept the dual leadership of the City Party Branch and the Bureau of Social Affairs. Moveover, the city authorities assigned one labor movement supervisor (gongyun dudao yuan) to each of the five urban districts to supervise all union activities there. Initially, these GMD's efforts did not offend workers in Qingdao for the following reasons. Firstly, the GMD forces entered Qingdao as soon as Japan announced surrender and they devoted great attention to the issue of labor movement and thus precluded the Communists' exploiting any power vacuum to openly mobilize workers, as what happened in Shanghai. Secondly, workers generally entertained hopes for the GMD regime after eight years of Japanese rule and especially for the GMD-led unions, which claimed it as their goals to "enhance workers' skills of production", "improve working conditions", and "mediate labor
disputes. Before long, however, the GMD's influence on workers would be undermined both by the regime's inability to solve labor problems and by the work of Communists.

Workers in Qingdao faced similar economic difficulties as in Shanghai in the years of 1945-1949: widespread unemployment and decrease in real income primarily stemming from inflationary spiral. The GMD local authorities proved unable to alleviate any of these problems, which in turn provided an opportunity for communist agitation among workers. As early as in December of 1945, Communists organized the Qingdao Workers' Federation. To avoid the GMD's persecution, the Federation chose Jimo, a county adjacent to Qingdao and within the Communist-controlled "liberated area", as its headquarters. As in Shanghai, the Communists in Qingdao also tried to focus on economic struggles, while avoiding the agitation which could be easily identified by the GMD regime as a political movement. The Federation particularly worked hard among unemployed workers and refuges, whose number reached 285,600 in late 1945 (Among them were 85,700 unemployed workers and their dependents). To win these people over to the Communist side, the Federation distributed to them relief grain, which it collected from the Jiaodong "liberated areas". To counterattack the Communist "conspiracy", the GMD Qingdao

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295 A history of Qingdao's worker movement (Qingdao gongren yundong shi), pp. 299-301.
authorities resorted to similar tactics: providing the refuges and the unemployed not only with relief grain but also free meals both within the urban area and in the villages close to the Communist-controlled region. In response, the Communists tried to convince the poverty-stricken people that the GMD was not showing real benevolence to the people, for the resources under GMD's control had originally belonged to the people and the latter had the legitimate right to get access to them. What the Communists did was to encourage people to accept relief grain from the GMD, but dissuade them from appreciating the regime. The Communists also actively got involved in various slowdowns and strikes. Partly due to their instigation, about thirty major "economic struggles" occurred between May 1947 and the end of 1948. Sometimes, "yellow" unions showed their sympathy toward workers either for gaining some popular basis or because of their contradictions with the management.

The economic struggle was an effective tactic for the CCP in its rivalry with the GMD. No matter whatever the result of labor unrest that focused on economic matters, success or failure, the CCP benefitted from it. The party could attribute the success to its own leadership and claimed to be a champion of workers' interests; and it could also held the GMD regime

296 Ibid., pp. 314-316.
297 Ibid., 337,
responsible for the failure, blaming the regime for its brutal suppression of popular movements and thus discrediting the GMD regime as a legitimate state power-holder. Indeed, partly due to the CCP-instigated economic struggle, workers and many other social groups (e.g., students and professionals) lost their confidence in the GMD regime and turned to the CCP as an alternative. Although the GMD regime still held the formal state power within the territories (Shanghai and Qingdao) under its control in the late civil war era, its social basis had been undermined by its political rival, the CCP, who had succeeded in winning the sympathy of the urban population, particularly workers.

The CCP's success in winning workers' support in the GMD-controlled areas was due as much to the Party's effective tactics (as analyzed above) as to the inherent weaknesses of the GMD as a state power. Like any state power, the GMD regime was concerned with maintaining social stability, order, and particularly the harmony between capital and labor, regarding any radical labor movements as destructive and undesirable. While it could not afford to ignore the demands of workers, the regime would not allow them to hurt the interests of capital and to disrupt production, which was a source of state revenue. By contrast, the CCP, as an "illegal" political force, favored and worked hard to incite radical labor unrest, with the aim of creating a chaotic situation, on which it
could capitalize. In so doing, the Party, unlike the GMD, did not need to show much concern for the interests of capital; and it could lay more stress on improvement of workers' conditions, thus conveniently portraying itself as a representative of workers' interests, while repudiating the GMD as workers' enemy. Certainly, such a communist stance was more appealing to Chinese workers than that of the GMD. What I suggest is that the relatively conservative nature of the GMD state (in terms of its labor policies) helped alienate workers and provided a chance for the CCP to successfully exploit the workers' grievances. The point is that any state power-holders are inherently conservative in their attitude toward the labor movement and even hostile to it. In this sense, the GMD regime succumbed to one of its own weaknesses it was unable to overcome. Or, in other words, the regime was partly a victim of being a state power itself in a tumultuous era, the late 1940s, particularly in the face of the powerful challenge from the CCP.

In this section, I have focused on how the CCP exploited the tactics it formulated in the mid-1930s in competing with the GMD regime for controlling the labor movement in the Civil War era. These tactics included infiltration into the GMD-led or "legal" trade unions and "economic struggles", which helped preserve the CCP's strength and assert its predominant influence among workers. It should be pointed out that such
strong influence did not necessarily mean that the CCP was able to dictate to workers and the labor movement. As indicated in the preceding pages, the Communists and unions under their leadership in Shanghai and Qingdao had to adjust their tactics to the needs or will of workers by focussing on economic matters instead of political ones. In other words, their tactics were shaped by or predicated on labor conditions rather than vice versa. The Party's strength lay in its ability to properly assess the labor conditions and turn them to the Party's advantage. To the CCP, protecting workers' interests coincided with its goal of overthrowing the existing state and winning national power. The CCP was ready to exploit the contradictions between the (Nationalist) state or capital and workers and posed as the workers' ally or representative. As far as workers were concerned, they benefitted from the CCP's involvement in the labor movement. Keenly concerned with improvement of their own conditions but generally lacking in organizational skills and the ability to systematically formulate their own platforms, workers needed the leadership of a certain disciplined party like the CCP, just as the CCP needed the workers' support in competing with the GMD. Therefore, the relationship between the CCP and workers can better be understood as a partnership or alliance than as one of domination and subordination. Accordingly, those trade unions under the CCP's leadership should not be simply
regarded as CCP's political instruments; they also served as a champion of workers' interests.
Chapter 8  From State Corporatism to Social Representation: Trade Unions under the CCP, 1949-1996

Trade unions did not abruptly lose their popular character and importance when the CCP took over the mandate on the mainland from the Nationalists in 1949. During the early years of its rule, roughly from 1949 to 1956, the Communist regime was lenient to trade unions and refrained from arbitrarily imposing its will on them. Such leniency was based on considerations of political expediency. The Communists had concentrated in rural areas before 1949. When they first moved into cities, they found themselves in a suspicious and even hostile environment. They faced the enormous task of restoring the urban economy and protecting cities from the sabotage of residual and hidden reactionary forces. The Communist regime desperately needed the close cooperation of workers and trade unions, especially in taking over the enterprises of the so-called "bureaucratic capitalists". To forewarn embezzlement, the regime generally recruited trade union members into the "factory assumption groups" or "committees for checking warehouses" that were formed at the time. As an expedient measure of stabilizing the urban economy, the communist regime allowed the national capitalists to continue their ownership and management of enterprises. This temporary arrangement meant that there still existed a proprietary class potentially hostile to the new regime, so the latter found it useful to
rely on trade unions to supervise this class and act as a mediator in labour-management disputes. The dispensability of trade unions for the CCP in dealing with urban problems earned unions high prestige, enormous influence, and a certain autonomy, during this period. The regime treated trade unions more like a partner than a subordinate. The power of trade unions was partly manifested in the repeated protest activities of workers, such as petitions, strikes, and slowdowns. In the Central and South regions alone, fourteen such incidents were reported in the first five months of 1953. Trade unions were most likely involved, or at least tacitly acquiesced, in these protest activities.

However, even during these "good days" for trade unions, there were already ominous signs that their authority and autonomy would be restricted. In December of 1951, Li Lisan, the party secretary of the All-China Federation of Trade

298 "Guanyu jiaqiang zibenzhuyi qiye zhong de gonghui gongzu de zhishi" (A directive on trade unions in capitalist enterprises) (1953), in the ACFTU (ed), Jianguo yilai zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian (Selected documents of the CCP central committee on the labor movement since the founding of the PRC) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1989) pp. 177-183.

299 "Quanzong dangzu guanyu bannian lai gedi gongren baogong gingyuan qingkuang de zonghe baogao" (ACFTU Party Group’s report on worker strikes and petitioning in various places in the first half of the year), in the ACFTU (ed) (1989), op. cit., pp. 172-175.
Unions (ACFTU), was criticized and removed from his position for "committing the mistakes of syndicalism and economism". Li insisted that trade unions, as mass organizations of workers, had different functions from the party. They should retain organizational independence and the party's leadership over them should be only ideological. To the central party leaders, Li was endorsing separation of trade unions from the leadership of the CCP. This was what the party called syndicalism. Li also acknowledged that within state-owned enterprises there were contradictions between "public" (state) interests and "private" (workers') interests. The former was represented by enterprise's managerial authorities and the latter by trade unions. Such a distinction was the basis for the existence of trade unions in the socialist state. Trade unions should be primarily concerned with workers' personal economic benefits. This was condemned by the party as "economism". It seems that the criticism of Li Lisan did not affect trade unions immediately or substantially. Li was succeeded by Lai Ruoyu as the principal leader of the ACFTU. Lai shared almost exactly Li's opinions about trade unions, although, ironically, he had to follow the trend of

Fundamental changes in the relations between trade unions and the party (state) did not take place until after 1956. By the end of that year, China became a socialist state with the process of "socialist transformation" completed. The private industrial and commercial enterprises had been taken by the state and become "public-owned enterprises". Gone also was the national bourgeoisie as a proprietary class and a potential threat to the communist regime. For the first time, the regime firmly controlled the nation’s economic resources and had successfully eliminated its major political rivals. All these were achieved with the cooperation of trade unions. Now the party-state was able and ready to impose its absolute authority over society, including mass organizations such as trade unions. From the party-state’s point of view, trade unions had already finished their historical mission of helping the party win and consolidate power and therefore were no longer indispensable. If they existed, they had to be incorporated into the state bureaucratic structure.

To justify this position, the regime took pains to stress the unity of interests of party-state and workers and downplay the contradictions between them. It claimed that, with the

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establishment of "socialist public ownership", enterprises belonged to all members of society including workers. Only on the workers' behalf did the state take the responsibility of managing these enterprises. In doing so, the state represented the workers' long-term and fundamental interests. There was simply no room for the kind of labour-management disputes and conflicts as existed in capitalist countries or in China before the socialist transformation. Workers did not need separate organizations such as trade unions to represent and protect them. 302 The communist regime was deliberately denying the distinction between the state and trade unions as social organizations, with the aim of neutralizing the latter.

The party-state's efforts to neutralize trade unions began with the criticism of Lai Ruoyu in 1958. It charged Lai with "not only repeating but also expanding the mistakes of Li Lisan", namely, syndicalism and economism. This time, the criticism was much harsher and more hostile than that with Li Lisan. Lai and his associates in the ACFTU were branded as "rightist opportunists" who wanted to make the trade unions into their "independent kingdom", "placing them above the

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party and government" and "using trade unions as a base to seize power from the party". 303 Trade union leaders were regarded as anti-party, anti-government elements and their contradictions with the party-state were defined as antagonistic. In retrospect, the above charges were too excessive and far beyond the truth. But they indicated that trade unions were still potentially an influential force that had not been completely subordinated to the party, and that they could be used by some factions in power struggles. The criticism of Lai also showed the party's deep-rooted fear that trade unions might deviate from Communist leadership. Deprived of all their previous bargaining counters and confronted with the increasingly hostile and overwhelming Communist party-state, trade unions were doomed to suffer.

In criticizing Lai Ruoyu, the Communist Party laid down its principles on the role of trade unions and their future relations with the party. First, trade unions must "unconditionally" accept the party's leadership not only ideologically but also organizationally. At all levels, they could become functional departments of party committees and work under the latter's "absolute" authority. Secondly, the major purpose trade unions' was to serve the party. Thirdly, party members working with trade unions represented the party and not the trade union. They had to follow the party's

303 Liu Lantao, op cit.
directives and could not assert independence. 304

These principles sounded the death knell of trade unions. To put them into practice was virtually tantamount to abolishing trade unions. The Communist regime did not choose abolition as an element of state policy, but rather, it allowed them to survive as a mass organization in form while changing them into a tool of the party in substance. This is the technique of state corporatism. The concept of "state corporatism" is borrowed from Anita Chan. Chan used it in analyzing the characteristics of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the top layer of China's trade union hierarchy, in the 1950s and the reform years. 305 State corporatism was understood as a scheme under which the socialist state imposed vertical organizational controls on population. The state either created new organizations or incorporated existing ones such as women's federations, Youth Leagues and above all trade unions into the state bureaucracy. The concept of state corporatism stresses the overwhelming power of state versus society. Accordingly, it is more useful

304 Liu Lantao, op. cit.

for understanding the trade unions of China before the reform, although Chan applied it to both periods. In the reform years, trade unions at the local level have been breaking away from official control and moving out of the state-corporatist mold. To better understand this process, we need to pay more attention to the growing power of society. This is not to deny completely the validity of Chan’s application of "state corporatism" to the ACFTU in the reform years, which as the national-level trade union underwent relatively little change compared to its local counterparts and still remains within the state corporatist structure.

State corporatist principles and techniques shaped trade unions from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. During this period, trade unions lost their popular character and were no longer workers’ organizations. They became appendages or a bureaucratic agencies of the party-state and served the latter’s interests. Trade union cadres were appointed by same-level party committees to whom they were directly responsible. Their funds were provided by the government. Membership was compulsory. The primary tasks of trade unions were to cooperate with party committees or administrative authorities in conducting such projects as "communist education" and the mobilizing of workers for "labour competition", "technological reform and innovation", and "increasing production and
practicing economy". 306 Sometimes, trade unions were assigned the job of overseeing and organizing such trivial matters as recreational activities and physical exercises. They showed little interest in things that most concerned workers: wage increases and labour protection. If any trade union leaders bothered interfering in them on the workers' behalf, they would have been rebuked by party committees or administrative leaders along the lines of: "What? You want to contend for power with the party and government! Are they not best representing the interests of the working class?" 307 Without autonomy or power or willingness to speak for workers, trade unions naturally lost workers' trust. Workers felt that trade unions were too submissive to party committees. In their language, the unions had to obey and serve the party and government "as a daughter-in-law does to her mother-in-law". From the point of view of workers' interests, trade unions were just "skeletons". 308 Trade unions suffered the most


severe setbacks during the Cultural Revolution. Many of them were paralyzed and even formally abolished by the radicals under the slogan of strengthening "the party’s unified leadership".

In sum, the period before 1949 and in the early 1950s was the "golden age" of trade unions in terms of the autonomy and influence they enjoyed as workers’ organizations. This had been possible because of diversity of social and political forces and the conflicts among them. By the late 1950s, trade unions lost their autonomous character and became "officialized" (guanhua). They operated within the state corporatist structure and served the state’s interests. As all of regime rivals had been removed, trade unions lost their former value as an ally. Their further autonomy could only hamper the regime’s attempt to gain unified control over the whole of society.

1. Urban Reform and Changes in Local Trade Unions

Urban reform was formally set in motion in 1984 to enhance productivity by "enlivening enterprises" (gaohuo qiyue). Among the major reform programs were factory-director (manager) responsibility and various forms of enterprise contracting and leasing. The reform was basically a process of redistribution of resources and power. It led to an increasing differentiation of the population into distinct social or
interest groups placed in potentially conflictual relationships. In enterprises, the two major interest groups were the managerial elite and the workers. The latter were in a particularly precarious situation and vulnerable to encroachment from the managerial group on issues such as wages and bonuses. They needed some organizational means to protect their specific interests. This was the basis for the changes in local trade unions. On the other hand, the state tended to refrain from directly interfering in enterprise operations and became more tolerant of local trade unions as mass organizations. It required trade unions to share its burdens in mediating labour-management disputes and especially in redressing workers’ grievances. To the state, the enthusiastic involvement of workers in the reform was a necessary condition for the success of the modernization crusade. Once again, trade unions gained some room to manoeuvre, which allowed them a chance to champion workers’ interests.

Under the director-responsibility system, the ownership and management of enterprises were separated. The state retained ownership while delegating management to enterprise directors. The latter were confirmed as the legal representative of enterprises and assumed the central position in their operation. Directors were made responsible for the profits and losses of their enterprises. At the same time, they received a variety of powers over issues such as labour
reorganization and rewards and penalties. Directors or managers were usually technical professionals or former administrative personnel. They constituted a unique interest group, the managerial or entrepreneurial group, different from both the state bureaucracy and workers. To enhance their interests and to safeguard themselves against the state intrusion, they formed their own organizations such as associations of directors (managers). This managerial group was still in its infancy in the 1980s: it was not completely independent of state bureaucracy, nor were many of its members qualified for their positions as they lacked the expertise and skill needed to manage modern enterprises. Vulnerable to interference from the state, managers were nonetheless in a powerful position relative to workers. Unlike the previous enterprise leadership, the new managers were more concerned with profitability than with ideological issues. They used every means at their disposal to increase profit, sometimes at the expense of workers. Many managers resorted to strict labour discipline and harsh penalties including heavy fines and dismissals for minor misconduct. For example, some managers stipulated that workers would lose one month's bonus

310 An Miao, Huang Shaoguo, and Cui Yi, Gongren jieji xianzhuang yu zhigong daibiao dahui zhidu yanjiu (The current situation of the working class and the system of workers' congress) (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1990), pp. 72-73.
for being late once. They tried to hold down wage increases, to extend working hours, and even to replace regular workers with cheap casual labourers. Such devices were especially common in enterprises operating under the leasing or contracting system. Concerned only with short-term results, managers basically ignored their workers' situation, including work safety. Some did not hesitate to abuse their power by giving priority to themselves, their family members, relatives and friends in matters such as promotion and distribution of bonuses and housing. According to a survey conducted in 1986, 45.35% of worker respondents felt that their relations with cadres and managers had deteriorated since the reform. Some workers complained that people in their enterprises were divided into two camps, the cadres, who made up the managerial elite, and the workers. The former enjoyed benefits far beyond the latter; the gap between them could not be closed.

As a social group, workers were clearly at a disadvantage in the reform years. Their social status had declined from "masters of the state" and "leading class" to that of mere

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311 Zhang Zhanxin and Wang Xiangdong, "Laoquan chanquan he jinying quan" (Labour power, ownership, and management), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), Gonghui gaige wencong; pp. 288-303.

hired labourers. Workers complained that "we have returned overnight to the pre-liberation days after thirty years of working hard". Although their status as masters of the state had been little more than an illusion, workers felt that they had once enjoyed respect under Mao's doctrine of "placing all under the leadership of the working class". In the reform years, that illusion was shattered. The "leading class" sank into oblivion. Workers were generally looked down upon and regarded as ignorant and rough. Elitist elements in the reform faction, some of whom were proponents of neo-authoritarianism, deemed workers simply as labourers to be dictated to, rather than a dynamic force that could be relied on to promote reform. As the glory of workers faded, the previously despised professionals and technical experts were elevated to unprecedented high status.

Perhaps more important than the psychological blow of losing their status as the "leading class" was the workers' relationship to the new economic benefits. The urban reform endorsed the principle of material incentives and linked workers' rewards to performance. Pursuing individual interests was finally recognized as legitimate and was encouraged. Workers, like all other social strata, became increasingly concerned with their personal economic benefits. Eager to get

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rich, they became ever more sensitive to infringements on their financial prospects. While workers were generally better off than before the reform, jobs and income were less secure. Workers felt more susceptible to forces beyond their control: they faced strong competition in the job market, inasmuch as there existed a large "reserve army of labour" flowing from the rural areas into cities, and they lived in the shadow of unemployment as some enterprises edged toward bankruptcy and were leased out to individual contractors without consultation. 314 Workers found that the odds were always against them, and that their desire to get rich was unrealistic. Although the first blamed were their immediate bosses, workers did not realize the root cause of their problems was the transition from the planned economy to a market-oriented economy. The managerial elite served as an easy scapegoat in a situation that was beyond the control of either group.

As enterprises differentiated into two different interest groups, managerial elite and ordinary workers, these groups found themselves in conflict with each other. Workers felt

314 Wang Linmiao et al., "Shitan zulinzhi dui gonghui tichu de wenti he yaoqiu" (A tentative discussion of the problems and demands for trade unions created by the leasing-out system); Duan Wen and Run Hua, "Dangqian zulin jingying zhong jige jixu jiejue de wenti" (Some problems to be urgently solved with the current management under the leasing-out system), in Guo Zhefeng (ed), op. cit., 256-260, 261-265.
they needed their own organizations to deal with the management. This placed the state in a dilemma. On the one hand, it had to guarantee the authority of the managerial elite on whom it relied to operate enterprises profitably and contribute to state revenue. On the other hand, the state had to find some way to appease workers by addressing their grievances. The state could not afford to alienate them as a social (power) basis. Many Chinese leaders knew well the ancient admonition that "water can carry a boat and it can also capsize it". They realized from the worker movements under the "Solidarity" in Poland that a long-suppressed discontented social group like workers could be an explosive force and a formidable political rival for a communist regime. In a word, the workers' grievances had to be redressed and their tensions with the managerial elite alleviated. Once again, the state turned to trade unions for help and began to stress the need for strengthening their role as workers' organizations, which meant allowing them to retain some autonomy. In 1987, the CCP general secretary Zhao Ziyang suggested that trade unions be distinguished from party and government in functions. "Trade unions should represent

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"Zhao Ziyang guanyu gonghui wenti de liangci tanhua" (Two talks of Zhao Ziyang on the union issue), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., p. 1; Qian Zhipei et al., "Dui gonghui yu zhengfu guanxi de tantao" (Inquiring into the relations between trade unions and government), in Guo Zhefeng (ed), op. cit., pp. 33-41.
workers' interests, speak for workers, and make them feel trade unions are their own organizations". An enterprise law passed in 1988 clearly stipulated, "Trade unions in enterprises represent and protect the workers' interests and operate independently and autonomously according to the law". Such statements marked a fundamental departure from the regime's past positions on trade unions. They stemmed from the communist regime's concern with the social problems discussed above. They were also a positive response to the demands and pressures from trade union leaders and scholars of workers' movements.

Indeed, the most vocal and persistent defence of workers' interests and appeals for trade union reforms came from leaders of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), including Ni Zhifu, Luo Gan and Chen Bingquan. They all endorsed protecting workers' interests as the primary function of trade unions and the rationale for their existence. They emphasized that workers, as a distinct social group, had their own interests different from others'. Workers' "lawful interests could be violated by bureaucratism and corrupt practices of state organs and managerial personnel of

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316 Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., p. 1.

enterprises". To defend their interests, workers needed to form their own trade unions based on the principle of voluntarism. 318 The ACFTU leaders argued that trade unions should be "independent and autonomous" rather than attached to party organizations and dictated to by the government. They should only follow the general policies of the party and work as an equal partner of government. At the same time, trade unions had to overcome their own "bureaucratic air" and "administrative inclination" and become really "mass-based" and "democratized". They should concentrate their work in the grassroots. 319 Many trade union workers insisted that trade unions enjoy the rights "to participate in state and social affairs and enterprise administration", "to be involved in making important decisions concerning workers' rights and

318 Luo Gan, "Gonghui bixu daibiao zhigong jianghua weihu zhigong liyi" (Trade unions must speak for workers and defend their interests), Gongren ribao, October 28, 1987; "Qieshi weihu zhigong liyi, duo congci canzheng yizheng--tong Liaowang jizhe tanhua" (To conscientiously protect workers' interests and (let them) participate in and discuss political affairs--talks with the reporter from the magazine Liaowang); Chen Bingquan, "Lianxi zhigong qunzhong de niudai yu qiaoliang--tong Liaowang jizhe de tanhua" (Ties and bridges linking the masses of workers--talks with the reporter from the magazine Liaowang), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., pp. 50-55, 72-77; Compiling group, Zhongguo gonghui zhongyao wenjian xuanbian (Selected important documents on Chinese trade unions) (Beijing: Jixie gongye chubanshe, 1990), pp. 72-98.

319 The ACFTU, "Gonghui gaige shexiang" (Basic Designs for trade union reform), in compiling group (ed), op. cit., pp. 99-110; Ni Zhifu, "Zai quanzong shijie wuci zhiwei hui shang de jianghua" (Speech at the ACFTU Standing Committee's meeting), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., pp. 12-19.
benefits", "to propose on labour legislation" and even "to strike". 320 Such arguments from the ACFTU and scholars were very popular among local-level trade union leaders and received their wide support. 321 They should not be dismissed simply as rhetorical and empty or "pure talk". Given that all the appeals and discussions about trade unions were made on public occasions, meetings and newspapers or magazines, there existed some "public space", no matter how limited, in the reform era, which trade unions could use to press their case. Such views represented a clear negation of official doctrines on trade unions which had existed since the late 1950s and constituted as well a search for a new ideology to justify the role of trade unions in society. Trade unions proved ready to take advantage of the relatively liberal political atmosphere which emerged as the party loosened its controls in the 1980s.

320 "Dui gonghui yu zhengfu guanxi de tantao" (Discussion on the relations between trade unions and government) by the Institute for Study of the Labor Movement (attached to the Shanghai General Trade Union), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., pp. 330-339.

321 Yang Xingfu (president of the General Trade Union of Shandong Province), "To Build Trade Unions as Workers' Organizations", Qingdao ribao, June 23, 1988; Zhang Zuodong (president of the Qingdao General Trade Union from 1985-1990), "All Trade Unions Should Defend Workers' Lawful Interests", Qingdao ribao, December 12, 1987; Sun Bingyue (deputy party secretary of Qingdao and late on president of the Qingdao General Trade Union), "Trade Unions Should Play an Active Role in Deepening the Enterprise Reform" and Zang Hewang (president of the trade union in Qingdao Second Plastics Plant), "Trade Unions Must Represent and Defend Workers' Interests", Qingdao ribao, August 29, 1988.
to argue for changes in the nature and functions of trade unions.

Such changes indeed took place and are especially visible at the local (city and enterprise) level. In the 1980s, trade unions usually consisted of three layers: one general trade union at the city level; several trade unions immediately below it at the level of districts or bureaus; and enterprise unions. In my research on the city of Qingdao in Shandong province, I have found that in the reform years unions at all levels were becoming more inclined to represent and safeguard the interests of workers; that they actively sought to gain a voice in making policies affecting workers' interests; and that they were breaking away from direct official control and gaining a measure of autonomy, especially at the second (bureau) and third (enterprise) levels.

The Qingdao General Trade Union (QGTU) stated unequivocally that it and other trade unions were representatives of interests of the city's workers. To publicize this position and attract the public attention to trade unions, it organized a city-wide discussion in 1988 on "how to build trade unions as the workers' own organization". The discussion lasted two months and got half a million workers involved. 322 It strengthened the institution of

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322 Sun Binyue (ed), Shetuanzhi (Qingdao, 1992), p. 43. As of the 1988, there were 743,843 trade union members in Qingdao.
"letters and visits" and established "the president's open telephones" to take workers' appeals. It set up a Legal Advisors' Office to provide legal assistance to workers, notably in their disputes with the management. The office actively exposed violations of workers' interests by management and urged the latter to follow the law and show restraint in imposing penalties on workers. The QGTU frequently conducted investigations of workers' conditions and transmitted workers' requests to the city party committee and government as well as upper-level trade unions. In the two years of 1988 and 1989, the QGTU completed fifteen special investigation reports and published eighty-seven issues of Gongyun xinxi (Information on workers' movements). Sixty-three of the QGTU's proposals were adopted by the city authorities and the upper-level trade unions. Most of these proposals concerned workers' immediate interests such as labour insurance, labour protection and welfare.

The QGTU also became directly involved in the city's "leading group" for the comprehensive reform of labour, wages, personnel and insurance, and participated in making policies or regulations concerning these matters. It requested that adjustments of wage increase rates in enterprises favour workers "on the first line" (those on the shop floor as distinguished from those in office jobs); that workers'

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323 Qingdao ribao, September 15, 1989.
medical welfare be protected; and that workers' congresses
have a say in the process of distribution within enterprises.
Most of these suggestions received a positive response from
the city authorities.  

The QGTU was particularly concerned
with the "democratic administration of enterprises". It
established a special organ, the Department of Democratic
Administration, which had the responsibility of encouraging
and ensuring workers' supervision over enterprise management.
The department helped set up workers' congresses, which were
specified in the new Enterprise Law, and frequently conducted
inspections of their operation. To make these congresses a
formal and regular institution, the QGTU drafted an
influential report on strengthening "workers' democratic
administration of enterprises" and a regulation on the
"operation of workers' congress at enterprises".  

Furthermore, the QGTU guided trade unions in enterprises to
set up special organs such as women committees, wage
committees and mediation committees to serve as watchdogs of
workers' interests.  

It should be pointed out that QGTU did not act on its own
but was pursuing most of these initiatives with the support of

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325 Sun Bingyue (ed), op. cit., p.27.

city authorities. The close relationship between the two was not surprising. The QGTU president was chosen by the city party committee, albeit with some public input; he was also a member of the city party committee's standing committee. City party authorities needed the cooperation of trade unions and still intended to retain its control over them; yet this did not necessarily mean that the QGTU simply served as the party's instrument. Trade unions expected to have their leaders recruited in policy-making bodies so that they could articulate their demands more legitimately. The QGTU was ready to utilize some officially-sanctioned institutions and channels to promote initiatives that served its interests and those of its constituency. Despite these official ties, or perhaps because of them, the QGTU behaved more like a champion than a state agency, and its president could act as a representative of trade unions within the party rather than just as the party's representative within trade unions. It would be a mistake to assume a conflictual relationship between trade unions and the city authorities, for they shared much in common. Both were concerned with maintaining social stability and economic development, and thus often proceeded in agreement.

At the enterprise level, trade unions played their role primarily through workers' congresses, of which they served as the executive organ. According to the Enterprise law, the
trade union committee was the "working organ of workers' congress" in an enterprise and had responsibility for handling the congress' day-to-day work. 327 By 1990, workers' congresses had been set up in 2,220 enterprises and institutions in Qingdao, accounting for 80 per cent of the city's total enterprises. 328 The Enterprise Law empowered them participate in enterprise administration, scrutinizing policies advanced by the management and supervising managers' performance. As popular institutions, their primary function was to safeguard workers' immediate economic interests against encroachment by the management. The efficacy of these workers' congresses varied from one enterprise to another. Some succumbed to "formalism" and only played a marginal role. Others, however, were relatively active and effective, especially in evaluating managerial personnel or enterprise cadres. In 1988, among 16,761 subject to workers' congress evaluation, 303 lost their positions due to unfavourable evaluation results. 329 Workers' congresses could also frustrate operational plans or proposals within the enterprise, notably those involving wage readjustment, distribution of bonuses and houses, and penalties on workers


328 Qingdao ribao, April 16, 1990.

breaking regulations. In 1990, 312 out of 2117 such proposals failed to go into effect because of opposition by workers' congresses. 330 Workers' congresses provided workers with a channel to express themselves and served as a check on the management. With the backing of their own institutions, workers were becoming more outspoken in the reform years. The managerial elite had to think twice in taking unpopular actions against them.

Compared with the Qingdao General Trade Union, trade unions at the enterprise level seem to have retained more autonomy. This was testified by the direct election system that came to replace the appointment system in the choosing of trade union presidents in enterprises. The experiment for direct elections started at six enterprises in early 1988. By the end of 1989, the system was extended to 690 enterprises. The candidates were recommended by members of enterprises including workers and cadres. They could also come from self-recommendations. Ordinary workers were often elected. 331 The elected trade union leaders were more responsive to workers' concerns than their previous counterparts.

The degree of autonomy for enterprise-level trade unions increased also due to the erosion of the authority of

330 Qingdao nianjian, 1991, p.158.
enterprise party committees. With the implementation of director-responsibility system, enterprise party committees gradually retreated from administrative affairs and turned to concentrate on ideological and political education. However, ideology was no longer a concern for workers as the urban reform went on. Material benefits counted more than party membership. The leadership of the party was only nominal. Even some leading figures of party committees felt deeply rejected, helplessly watching their prestige and power fade away. For trade unions, this was something to celebrate: they did not need to compliantly serve this arbitrary mother-in-law, party committees any longer, and could enjoy more free space.

As administration became streamlined, a number of industrial bureaus and bureau-level party committees directly under city-level authorities were abolished, which meant that the corresponding bureau-level trade unions also died away. In their place emerged a new type of organization, the trade union federations. These federations were formed by trade unions at the grassroots level in enterprises within the same industrial sector. In Weifang, for example, a Federation of Trade Unions for the textile industry was formed from most of the enterprise trade unions in this sector. Similar organizations were created in the sectors of machinery industry, light industry and chemical industry. The initiative for organizing these highly independent federations came from
enterprise trade unions rather than political authorities. Membership was voluntary, leaders were elected instead of being appointed, and their operating funds came from members rather than from the government. The federations did not attach themselves to any party committees or governmental organs and were largely free from direct political interference.  

In Weifang and Changzhou, two cities experimenting with institutional reform, the federation were more autonomous than the unions at the enterprise level.

Immediately after the Tiananmen incident of 1989, the communist regime attempted to tighten its control over social organizations. Following a regulation from the State Council on the administration of social organizations in October 1989, the Qingdao authorities systematically investigated and registered social organizations in the city with the purpose of eliminating "disturbing elements". It stipulated that any unregistered organizations had to disband; that those with similar functions be combined; and that those breaking regulations be banned. In terms of the trade union work, however, there was no turning back. Although the regime repeatedly stressed the importance of unified leadership of

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332 Xu Bing et al., "Weifang shi gonghui lianhe hui diaocha" (An investigation of trade union federations in Weifang), in Tian Ming and Xu Jianchuan (eds), op. cit., pp. 388-396.

the party, it still recognized the character of trade unions as workers' organisations and accepted the need for them to operate autonomously. After the short period of retrenchment, the economic reform resumed and gained new momentum, especially after Deng Xiaoping's "southern tour" in 1992. In 1993, the Chinese regime officially endorsed the market economy and began the experiment with establishing "a modern enterprise system". This new round of reform aimed at transforming state-owned enterprises into independent economic entities with the status of a juridical person. It confirmed that labour was a commodity and virtually acknowledged that the relationship between workers and enterprises was a purely economic contract between wage labourers and employers. The latter had the power to hire or fire workers, while workers had the freedom to choose employers. In reality, however, the existence of a large surplus labour force meant that workers had little choice in the face of "rationalization". The scheme for developing a market economy in the post-Tiananmen period thus contributed to intensifying labour-management tensions, notably in the

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334 Compiling group, Zhongguo gonghui zhongyang wenjian xuanbian, pp. 165-179.

335 "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jianli shehuizhuyi shichang jingji tizhi ruogan wenti de jueyi" (CCP Central Committee's resolution on various issues regarding the building of a socialist market economic system) (November 14, 1993), Renmin ribao, November 17, 1993.
former state-owned sector. Accordingly both the régime and workers still needed trade unions, albeit for different purposes, and the trend toward increased autonomy has not been reversed.

Two developments in the early 1990s confirmed this trend. First, the state made more of an effort to legalize the rights of enterprise trade unions as workers' representatives and as mediators in labour-management disputes, as seen in the Trade Union Law, the Regulations on Handling Labour Disputes in Enterprises, and the Labour Law, passed in 1992, 1993 and 1994 respectively. Under the Labour Law, enterprise trade unions could now supervise the implementation of labour contracts between workers and employers and to intervene on the workers' behalf if employers cancelled or broke contracts. The law also stipulated that trade unions should represent workers in signing collective contracts with management regarding wages, working hours, vacation, labour safety and sanitation as well as insurance and welfare. The law put enterprise trade unions on the side of workers. 336

Dispute mediation became a primary function of enterprise-level trade unions. 337 Each enterprise was

336 "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo laodong fa" (The labour law of the PRC), Gongren ribao, July 6, 1994.
337 "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo gonghui fa" (The trade union law of the PRC), Gongren ribao, April 8, 1992.
required to set up a tripartite mediation committee consisting of representatives from the workers, management and the trade union, with the union as director. Trade union representatives were also to sit in arbitration committees at the county, urban district and city level. If a dispute between labour and management were to arise in an enterprise, the two parties might first seek solution by the enterprise mediation committee. If the mediation failed, they could apply for arbitration by the arbitration committees. The last resort was to bring the case to the People’s Court. 338

These laws and regulation provided trade unions with legal means to defend workers’ rights and interests and gave unions a legitimate niche as mediators in enterprises, roles that demanded a large measure of autonomy from state organs. Concerned with maintaining stable and harmonious labour relations in enterprises, the state hoped to nip all labour disputes in the bud at the enterprise level. On the other hand, the state was ready to disengage itself from labour disputes, partly for avoiding becoming a target of grievances and charges from either workers or management and maintaining its alleged neutral image as the representative of the whole nation. The state deemed it more desirable to allow the

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338 "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo qiye laodong zhengyi chuli tiaoli" (The regulation on handling labour disputes in enterprises in the PRC), Gongren ribao, July 21, 1993; "Laodong fa".
population in enterprises to manage themselves, and particularly, let trade unions to assume the principal role in settling labour-management disputes. This also served as a technique of the state to appease workers. With trade unions in charge, workers would feel that they were represented and their disputes with the management could be fairly dealt with. The prospects of trade unions as mediators seem to be bright. Up to July of 1993, 220,000 mediation committees at enterprises and 2,800 arbitration committees at the urban-district or city level had been set up, accepting and hearing 1,000,000 cases of labour disputes. Among these cases, 710,000 were successfully settled by enterprise mediation committees, most of the others were solved by arbitration committees, only about 1,000 were presented to the court. 339

The other development in the work of local trade unions in the early 1990s was that it began to penetrate private and foreign-related enterprises. Such enterprises have been mushrooming especially in China's coastal areas in the reform years under the vigorous encouragement from the Chinese government. In the 1980s, they were basically exempt from the intrusion of trade unions. On the one hand, there were no traditional trade unions in these enterprises when they were found. On the other, several critical factors hindered the emergence of new trade unions in them. First of all, private

and foreign business people were generally suspicious of trade unions and feared that such organizations would instigate workers to oppose the management, especially to request wage increase and strike. Some foreign investors even threatened to suspend their investment projects when they detected signs of forming trade unions in their enterprises. Furthermore, some Chinese local authorities, eager to woo foreign capital and promote the local economy, chose to appease foreign investors and discouraged the effort of organizing trade unions in foreign-related enterprises. In addition, large numbers of workers in these enterprises, which were mostly labour-intensive, came from rural areas and even remote interiors. Poorly educated, they failed to realize that they could organize trade unions as formal means to protect their own interests. Some even did not know what the trade union meant.

The labour-management relationship turned out to be more strained in some foreign-related enterprises than in their Chinese counterparts. This was partly due to the cultural barriers between foreign employers and Chinese workers. The latter were, at least initially, not used to the efficient but strict capitalist mode of management. The root cause, however, lied in the unreasonable conduct of some foreign managers.

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Gongren ribao, August 20, 1993; March 23, 1994; February 17, 1995.
They forced workers to work extra shifts or hours without overtime pay. In some of Qingdao’s foreign enterprises, the working hours per day were between 9 and 13. In an electronic company, each worker worked 100 extra hours monthly in one whole year. Some foreign investors neglected labour protection. For instance, the chemical industrial enterprises in Qingdao and Guangdong provided no dustproof and gas protection equipment, often resulting in vicious accidents. Some investors either failed to sign labour contracts or just stipulated workers’ duties in contracts without mentioning their rights. Besides, some practices once prevalent in pre-1949 days revived in some foreign-related enterprises, including corporal punishments and personal insults. For example, a toy company in Qingdao employed male guards to make body searches of women workers to prevent theft. Such maltreatment often provoked resistance from workers—slowdowns, deliberate wasting of materials, and strikes. In January of 1993, the Chinese workers in a Japanese-owned electrical machinery plant in Qingdao staged a strike against

341 Zeng Xiaoming, Tian Jie, and Ding Guoyuan, "Guanyu bufen sanzi qiye yuangong quanyi qingkuang diaocha zhier" (The second investigation of the rights and interests of workers in foreign-related enterprises), Gongren ribao, November 10, 1993. Also see Gongren ribao, August 1, 1994; December 19, 1994; Liu Jinghui and Zeng Mingzi, "Sanzi qiye laodong baohu yousilu" (The worrying labour protection conditions in foreign-related enterprises), Liaowang, no. 5 (January 1994), pp. 26-29; no. 6 (February 1994), pp. 15-17.
the poor material treatment, which lasted eight days and enjoyed the support of workers from two other foreign enterprises. 342 From January through May of 1993, strikes were reported to occur nationwide in 100 foreign-related enterprises. 343 Such events and other forms of labour disputes proved to happen more frequently in foreign-related enterprises also because there were no such formal organizations as party committees as deterrence and the Chinese workers came to realize that being militant to foreign capitalists would not incur serious political trouble.

It is not my intention to tarnish the image of foreign-related enterprises in China by exposing their dark side. Actually, most of them have performed well and made great contributions to China's modernization. However, the above-mentioned problems did exist in some of these enterprises. I describe them here simply because they pertain to the topic under discussion: they finally drew the wide attention of the Chinese authorities and trade union leaders, convincing them that trade unions were also and even more needed as mediators between labour and employers in foreign-related enterprises than in their Chinese counterparts. In 1994, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council transmitted a report by the ACFTU on building trade unions in foreign-related enterprises,

343 Gongren ribao, November 11, 1993.
urging local authorities to place it on their agenda. Later, the ACFTU and five ministries under the State Council jointly issued a notice about strengthening the trade union work in foreign-related enterprises. \[344\] In Qingdao in 1993, the city party committee put forward the so-called "three-simultaneousness" principle: in negotiating foreign investment projects, the Chinese side should simultaneously explain to foreign business people and stipulate in contracts that workers have the right to organize trade unions according to the law; preparations should be made for organizing trade unions while enterprises are under construction; and they should begin to function simultaneously when the enterprises go into operation. In close cooperation with the city authorities, the Qingdao General Trade Union and district-level trade unions made annual plans to establish trade unions in 85% of all foreign-related enterprises in the city by the end of 1993. \[345\]

Trade unions took upon it themselves to harmonize the relations between Chinese workers and foreign employers. On the one hand, they expressed workers' requests and grievances to employers and acted on their behalf in negotiations. Yet trade unions also acted as a useful partner of employers. They

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\[344\] Gongren ribao, October 21, 1994; November 2, 1994.

helped foreign capitalists understand aspects of local culture that affected the workplace, and provided suggestions as to how enterprises might be better operated. They cooperated with the management in explaining labour policies to workers, maintaining labour discipline, and modifying or curbing unreasonable demands from some workers, thereby preventing minor disputes from evolving into confrontations. The work of trade unions as mediators in foreign-related enterprises has proved to be constructive and indispensable. Most major labour-management disputes occurred in those enterprises without trade unions. 346

Trade unions in foreign-related enterprises were usually started by cadres sent down by local party committees or high-level trade unions. Over time, their leaders were chosen by the workers through election. In the Shekou Industrial District of Shenzhen, for example, annual elections took place in 99.8% of foreign-related enterprises. These unions operated quite autonomously and gained enormous influence within their enterprises. 347 Their autonomy can be accounted for partly by

346 Zeng Xiaoming, Tian Jie, and Ding Guoyuan, "Guānyu bufen sanzi qiye yangong quanyi qingkuang diaocha zhisān" (The third investigation of the rights and interests of workers in foreign-related enterprises), Gongren ribao, November 11, 1993. Also see, Sheng Mingfu et al., "Shekou gongye qu gonghui qishihu" (Inspirations from the trade unions of the Shekou Industrial District), Gongren ribao, November 30, 1994; December 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8, 1994.

347 Gongren ribao, December 1, 1994.
the absence of party organizations. Ultimately, however, it stemmed from the unions' multiple role as a mediator in a complex new environment created by the reform. Workers looked to trade unions as their representatives; foreign employers sought their cooperation in dealing with workers; and the party-state relied on them to stabilize labour-management relations.

2. Trade Unions, the State, and Civil Society in China

Local trade unions in the reform years shook off their status as official agencies of the state. The changes took place gradually and quietly through the 1980s and early 1990s. Nonetheless, they pushed trade unions in the direction of becoming autonomous social organizations. In the process, state-society relations changed. During most of the Mao years, the party-state effectively maintained its dominance over society and held to the claim of being the representative of society. It deliberately denied society status as a distinct entity. The overriding power of state over society was, among other things, manifested in its successful efforts to neutralize social organizations, including trade unions, and strip them of autonomy. In the reform era, however, as society became increasingly diverse and dynamic, the state was no longer able or willing to monopolize all powers-within society. Instead, the state had to recognize the legitimacy of
distinct interests within society. It accepted that some officially controlled organizations such as trade unions were slipping from its grip and gaining a certain autonomy. It even tolerated the formation of some nongovernmental organizations. The power of society was growing and constituted a challenge to the state.

Although state and society were often in conflict due to their differences in interests, the two had common concerns that could make cooperation possible. As suggested above, the state chose to strengthen local trade unions and shifted to them the function of mediating labour-management disputes in the hope of appeasing an increasingly discontented workforce. On the other hand, social organizations, like trade unions, could find resources in state organs that they could use for their own benefits. Local governments, no matter how meddling, could act as patrons for some social groups and their organizations as well as individuals. No wonder local trade unions usually felt it desirable to "hook up" or attach to government organs. They hoped to get the "benevolent" support of the state in dealing with the managerial elite. The latter rather than state was trade unions' principal target.

There is no strong consensus among China scholars about how or even whether to apply a European-based concept like civil society to China. Heath Chamberlain has rejected all three major perspectives on civil society in China, while
Frederic Wakeman finds the effort to apply Habermas' concepts to China "poignant" but ultimately unsatisfactory. Yet despite the risk, there may be something to gain by adapting the concept of civil society to the Chinese case. Most China scholars agree that the primary characteristics of civil society are the existence of voluntary, non-governmental, and autonomous social organizations counterpoised to the state. From a historical perspective, scholars like David Strand have argued that a civil society was in existence in the republican period, and that after the "interregnum" of state socialism in the Mao years civil society reemerged in the reform era. Strand's perspective has largely inspired the treatment of trade unions in this thesis: trade unions once enjoyed some autonomy as social organizations before the establishment of socialism in China; later they were transformed into and remained a state agency until the early 1980s; and from then on they began to regain their character as social organizations enjoying some degree of autonomy from the state. The changes in local trade unions in the reform years, in


combination with other developments suggest that some elements of a civil society are emerging in China. Given the still immense power of the state, China has a long way to go to have a civil society characterized by social organizations with substantial and secure autonomy as currently exist in Western democracies. The nongovernmental social organizations that have emerged in China in the reform years are too fragile and vulnerable to state power. The traditional mass organizations such as trade unions, while having gained some popular appeal and a certain autonomy, are still under the general political supervision and direction of the party-state. This does not, however, mean that the state has been undiscriminately hostile to social organizations and constituted a long-term stumbling block to the emergence of civil society. The Chinese state’s authoritarian nature in the reform era has undergone great modification and has by no means been immune to pressures from social forces. It has had frequently to adjust its policies to the social changes and respond to the demands of interest groups. The gradual transition from state-controlled trade unions to organisations that seek to represent social interests distinct from state

interests has been the result of the state's positive response to the social problems produced by economic reform. In this sense, I agree with Heath Chamberlain that the state can contribute to the formation of civil society. 351 In the long run, the prospects for the emergence of a full-fledged civil society in China do not seem bleak. The deepening economic reform and the profound social changes it produces will create further conditions in its favor.

From this perspective, the application of the concept of civil society to China can offer a useful perspective for looking at state-society relations in China. Unlike the concept of state corporatism, which puts too much stress on the intentions and actions of state, civil society induces us to think more about the influence of underlying social forces. This approach is particularly important for understanding the reform years, when China has undergone enormous social changes and has seen rapid growth of societal power. Nor is the applicability of the concept of civil society to China nullified by the fact that it originated in the West and bears the characteristics of Western societies. Most of the concepts Western scholars apply to the study of China come from the West--capitalism, bourgeoisie, market economy, urbanization, democracy, and symbolic capital, to name a few that have proved illuminating. These externally derived concepts lead us

351 Heath Chamberlain, op. cit.
to think about China in comparison with the West and, in doing so to perceive what is specific to China. By contrast, to assert that civil society has been absent from China is to work from an ideal type of Western civil society. Applying the concept of civil society as an analytical tool to China does not necessarily require that a civil society exist in China. From the perspective of historical philosophy, it is untenable to argue that the Chinese are so peculiar in their social behavior that there is no way for them to form anything like civil society. Such an assertion is even more untenable now that China is being increasingly integrated into the world economy and sharing global influences with the West. In fact, some prominent preconditions for civil society are already visible in China, including the emergence of a market economy, the rapid differentiation of social interests, the growth of a middle class, urbanization and the loosening of state control over social life. Similar conditions once existed in Western Europe when the civil society first emerged there, though I offer this comparison without assuming that a Chinese civil society must replicate its Western counterpart.

It may be worth thinking further on the issue of civil society in China. Firstly, we cannot expect a unified civil society to emerge in the short run. Civil society in any country is internally divided, with voluntary and autonomous associations or organizations representing different social
interests and in potential conflict with one another. The
tensions among them can sometimes be more serious than those
between them and state, and can be exploited by the latter. In
this competitive environment, some social organizations may
turn to see the state as their ally. This is the inherent
weakness of civil society in its confrontation with state. I
do not intend to exclude the possibility that different social
organizations may be united or reach some consensus over
certain issues, or at certain "moments of crises", as Timothy
Brook shows. But these moments of unity and consensus will
prove to be the exception.

Secondly, civil society may be elite-oriented. Better-
educated and more articulate, the elite are more disposed to
organize in protecting their vested interests or seeking more
power, wealth and prestige; and they possess the resources and
skills to assume the leadership of organizations. In the
Chinese context, it is usually the intellectuals and
entrepreneurs who first realize and exploit the advantages of
formal organizations, whereas peasants are the last social
group to do so. Here perhaps lie some limitations of civil
society as a conceptual instrument for understanding China. It
may lead us to pay more attention to the activities of the
elite and cities where most of them concentrate and pass over
the vast majority of China's population, the inarticulate
peasants in the countryside. It is not surprising that most
Western studies of civil society in China have focussed on cities and the activities of such social groups as merchants and intellectuals including students. Closely related to this elitist bias is the narrowness of the concept of civil society. This concept is, as most studies show, particularly concerned with formal social organizations and their relations with the state. However, even in the most urbanized areas in China not all people or interest groups are involved in formal organizations due either to restrictions imposed by the state or to people's ignorance. For a comprehensive understanding of society and its relations with state in China, we need theoretical frameworks that are broader than the concept of civil society.

Finally, while the emergence of a civil society in China deserves to be hailed, the state may continue to play some significant and positive role. With the increasing diversification of social interests and the intensification of social contradictions in the transition to a market economy, the state must act as a relatively neutral power to maintain social stability, to protect the inarticulate and the weak and to maintain social equity. A social organization may be flawed with parochialism and primarily concerned with the interests of the group of population it represents, whereas the state has to consider the interests of the whole population, if only for the sake of maintaining its legitimacy. The common good of
China's citizens may depend on the efforts--and on the cooperation--of both civil society and the state.
Conclusion

In this study, I have focused on one aspect of China's labor movement—the relationship between trade unions as a societal force and state power as a political force in the pre-1949 and post-Mao reform years. I have attempted to illustrate that this relationship was characterized by alliance and rivalry and that unions, instead of being tools in the hands of political parties, represented the basic interests of workers and therefore demonstrated a considerable popular character.

From the very beginning, Chinese trade unions have been closely connected to state and other political forces. The point is that these forces needed workers' support in consolidating or striving for state power and therefore regarded it imperative to become involved in labor mobilization, particularly in organizing trade unions. Their involvement partly accounted for the proliferation of various labor organizations, including "signboard" and "yellow" as well as "red" unions, in the pre-1949 years. Such involvement also helped to shape unions' character and functions and gave them certain political orientations as demonstrated by such terms as "yellow" and "red". However, political authorities or parties, whether warlord or GMD or CCP, were not able to transform unions into pure instruments of partisan struggles, due to contradictions, competition, or mutual check among
these political forces. Competition not only existed among different political regimes (warlord, GMD, and CCP), but also between different factions within a certain regime, such as the struggle between the city party branch and city government within the GMD. The political parties' aspiration for overriding their rivals compelled them to cultivate confidence of workers as a social group and, for this purpose, they had to show consideration for labor problems and interests, which in turn made it possible for unions to maintain some popular character and a certain degree of autonomy no matter what their political orientations. On the other hand, workers seem not so passive as to be easily manipulated by unscrupulous politicians. Having a keen sense of their own distinct interests (primarily economic), they would chose to support only those political parties that offered them the most and join and defend unions that best represented them. The restraints on the power of political authorities or forces and the ability of laborers to make choice and the possibility for them to do so determined that the union-state relationship could be a partnership or alliance.

Usually, it was non-national (state) power holders or relatively weak political forces or parties which were more likely to forge alliance with workers. They needed to compensate for the insufficiency of their political or military resources by allying with societal forces including
workers. Thus, the CCP, the weakest political force in most of the pre-1949 years, proved most committed to the labor movement and sensitive to workers' grievances and demands. To a lesser degree, the GMD before 1928 adopted a similar labor policy and within the regime (after 1928), the city party branch, which was weak compared to the city government, showed more interest than the latter in seeking alliance with labor, as I have testified by the case of Qingdao.

While political forces including state had to use trade unions as an ally, they also regarded the latter as a rival and a potential challenge to their efforts to monopolize and consolidate power. It is therefore not surprising that every dominant political party or state power-holder attempted to harness trade unions and limit the scope of their activities. Unchecked growth of labor power could not only pose a direct threat to state power, but could also disturb the balance between different social groups and hence indirectly undermine the state's legitimacy. In the Chinese context, state is supposed, beside its own power, to protect the interests of society as a whole rather than one single social stratum.

The paradigm on the alliance and rivalry between trade unions and state (and other major political forces) suggests that there was a space for relatively autonomous social organizations in pre-1949 China and that state power was far from neutralizing societal forces. Such findings also can
apply to the post-Mao reform era as I have analyzed in detail in the last chapter of this thesis.
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