

THE H.M.S INITIATIVE

DOCUMENT NUMBER 6.0.1

Points of contention:

1. Yuan Shikai's role in leading to the rise of warlordism?
2. How was Yuan Shikai's rule bad for China? "Betrayal of the republic" as in how he abandoned the ideals of 3Ps.
3. Did Yuan Shikai betray the republic or was it not his fault?

How did Yuan Shikai betray the Republic, and with what consequences?

Time frame (for assessing betrayal): Yuan's rule, from 1912 to 1916

Criteria for assessing whether he betrayed the Republic:

- Did he contravene Sun's Three People's Principles, which was what the Republic was founded to be based upon?
- Nationalism
- People's livelihood
- Democracy

The three themes:

- Firstly, Yuan undermined democracy...
 - **Why we can consider his undermining of democracy a betrayal: when Yuan was inaugurated as the first President of the Republic on 10 March 1912, he promised to uphold the provisional constitution and the new Republic.**
 - He installed his cronies into the executive branch of government
 - § E.g. when Yuan forcibly disbanded Tongmenghui, or the Alliance League, troops in Nanjing without the Premier's countersignature, as required by the Constitution. Thus, on 16 June 1912, Premier Tang Shaoyi resigned in protest along with the four Tongmenghui cabinet members. However, this only helped to further Yuan's consolidation of his power as he appointed his friend, Zhao Bingzhun, as premier on 24 September 1912
 - **Destroyed the democratic institutions**
 - § **Abolished political parties**

- E.g. On 4 November 1913 he dissolved the GMD, revoking the credentials of 358 Members of Parliament
 - § Abolished Parliament
 - E.g. By January 1914, the National Assembly could not operate due to a lack of parliamentarians so Yuan dissolved the Assembly
- Attempted to install himself as a monarch
 - § Extended and gave greater powers to the Presidency
 - E.g. He called a national conference to revise the 1912 provisional constitution. The result was a new 'constitutional compact' promulgated on 1 May 1914. It extended the presidential term to ten years, renewable by re-election without limit. In addition, the president had the right to nominate a successor
 - § Made himself emperor
 - E.g. Yuan was prepared to create a new Chinese dynasty. First, he tried to gain foreign support by agreeing to Japan's 21 Demands in January 1915. On 21 August, a 'Peace-Planning Society' was created to organize support for Yuan as emperor. On 20 November, the National People's Representative Assembly voted for monarchy. On 12 December, Yuan finally agreed to their demands. The following day, he decreed that 1916 would be the start of his new reign as the 'Hongxian' emperor
 - Although this attempt failed:
 - Yuan was forced to delay his enthronement scheduled for 1 January 1916. Under intense pressure, Yuan was forced to give up his attempt to become emperor on 22 March 1916
- The consequences?
 - § The way he consolidated power around himself meant that after he died, a power vacuum was left that was filled in by the warlords → rise of warlordism
 - § Furthermore in an undemocratic system, he had come to rely on his generals for support – these generals would become some of the warlords that would emerge – contributing to the rise of warlordism
 - § *although it is important to note that warlordism was also a culmination of the trend of decentralisation that had happened since the late Qing government, where in the face of the twin challenges of imperialism from without and rebellions from within, the court bestowed more power upon the provincial leaders
 - § Yuan's undermining of democracy also left the central government weakened when the power vacuum he left was taken over by the warlords
 - E.g. up to 1928 China had 9 presidents and 26 premiers
 - § Weak central government + powerful warlords → a disunited China would not be able to address the problems of imperialism, and the strengthening

and development of the country (ultimate significance of Yuan's undermining of democracy for China)

- Second, Yuan allowed for greater inference in China's affairs from foreign powers
 - He sought foreign support for his government and his monarchical dreams
 - § He accepted a huge foreign loan of \$10 million in April 1913; to be repaid after 47 years which would have cost China 43 million pounds
 - § He accepted Japan's 21 Demands in June 1915 (except the term about Japanese advisers, because it was in the context of growing domestic opposition to Yuan and his accommodation with the Japanese; in this Yuan was trying to achieve appeasement)
 - Which sought to confirm Japan's acquisition of the Shandong peninsula which was taken from Germany after Japan entered WWI,
 - To expand Japan's sphere of influence over Manchuria and Inner Mongolia,
 - To take over the Hanyeping industrial complex,
 - To prevent China from ceding any coastal or island concessions to the Chinese police, and
 - To appoint Japanese advisers and to take over control of the Chinese police
 - The consequences?
 - § Instead of stemming the trend of increasing foreign involvement in China since the late Qing period, which had seen 'unequal' treaties force China to give concessions to foreign powers, Yuan continued it
 - § China's national sovereignty was threatened, especially with the rise of Japan as a global power (which it asserted on China with the 21 Demands)
 - § As a result, foreign interference would continue immediately after Yuan's death in the Warlord Era
 - The warlords needed foreign backing especially in terms of loans and military support, hence they provided much economic concessions to the foreigners
 - This supported some of the foreigners' aims of protecting the 'unequal' treaties
 - E.g. in the 1920s, Britain followed by Japan were the biggest investors in China
 - E.g. from 1912-23, foreign investment in shipping was 77% while coal mining 78%
 - E.g. Japanese officials and businessmen made large investments in Manchuria under Zhang Zuolin
 - § The fact that China was disunited in the Warlord Era, partly due to Yuan's undermining of democracy (see above for the theme of 'Yuan undermined

democracy' – good because there's a connection shown between themes), also contributed to China's inability to stand up to foreign imperialism

- Thirdly, Yuan failed to address the welfare of the Chinese people
 - This is not to say there were no attempts at all at economic/social development by Yuan, it is just that it did not work out, because of the context: the government faced a lack of revenue
 - In fact, Yuan is considered a modernising conservative by some historians
 - He did try to develop the economy, establishing a centralised currency, new livestock strains, afforestation, etc.
 - He did introduce free lower primary school system whereas the gentry wanted more emphasis on elite education; he also promoted teacher training
 - He wanted to suppress opium
 - In the end though, he was badly hindered by a lack of revenue
 - § Yuan inherited a government that was bankrupt, bleeding a deficit of 13 million yuan every month
 - § Yuan collected virtually none of the land tax
 - § With customs revenue in the hands of the foreign powers, the Chinese government had to live off internal transit taxes and miscellaneous goods taxes like the tax on teas
 - In addition, the peasants were not touched by his policies; it would only be after the CCP's reforms that the peasants' lives were affected
 - The consequences?
 - § There came dissatisfaction with the Republic and the perceived failure of the Republic to address China's problems
 - § Connection to other themes: the perception of the failure of the Republic was also contributed by the continued presence of foreign imperialism (see theme of 'Yuan allowed for greater interference in China's affairs from foreign powers) + the failure of the Republic to give the people a say in the rule of the country due to Yuan's undermining of democracy
 - § This led Chinese intellectuals to think that a more fundamental revolution in China's underlying beliefs and culture, and not just a superficial change in the political system, would be needed for China to strengthen itself and support the lives of its people → New Culture Movement e.g. Chen Duxiu called for 'Mr. Democracy' and 'Mr. Science'
 - § This politicised the Chinese people in the search for solutions to China's problems, and contributed to the appearance of multi-class mass movements like the May Fourth Movement

In what ways, and to what extent, was Yuan Shikai responsible for the rise of warlordism in China in the early twentieth century?

Warlordism became dominant after the death of the first President of the Republic of China, Yuan Shikai, where powerful local generals exploited the weakness of the central government to set themselves up as rulers in their own areas. Yuan can be blamed for China's descent into warlordism, because he gave his generals power in certain provinces, dividing the country after his death. At the same time, both the increasing regionalism in China since the late 19th century and the weakness of the Nationalist or Guomindang (GMD) Party can be held responsible for the rise of warlordism in the early 20th century. However, among all these factors, increasing provincialism since the late Qing period is the most important, because it meant that Yuan's efforts to fully centralize the Chinese state were to be in vain.

Yuan Shikai's role in the rise of warlordism was in installing his generals to be in charge over certain provinces, giving them the ability to fill the power vacuum as warlords after his death, and arousing the discontent of certain provincial leaders due to his attempts at centralizing power under himself, exacerbating the division of the Chinese state. Yuan became President of the Republic of China on 10 March 1912. However, he would undermine the Republic by removing opposition and installing supporters within the government and dissolving the structures of the Republic. Yuan installed his friends and supporters in the executive branch of the republican government, and even though in December 1912 the newly formed GMD party won the elections, its leader, Song Jiaoren, was assassinated on 20 March 1913, crippling the power of the Parliament. When Yuan negotiated a foreign loan of \$25 million without the approval of Parliament in April 1913, Parliament impeached Yuan, and Yuan responded by dismissing GMD military governors throughout southern China. In response to this, on 12 July 1913, Jiangxi and 6 other provinces declared independence under GMD auspices in what was called the 'Second Revolution'. This affront to Yuan's power was quickly crushed by Yuan, who installed his generals to take control of these provinces. When Yuan dies in 1916, these warlords will come to fill in the power vacuum left by Yuan, contributing to the rise of warlordism.

After the failure of the 'Second Revolution', Yuan maneuvered to dissolve Parliament and extend the lifespan of his Presidency, which was legally allowed for by the 'constitution compact' promulgated on 1 May 1914. Yuan, still power-hungry, endeavoured to make himself the emperor of China. Yuan announced late in 1915 that

for the sake of the nation he would restore the imperial title and accept it for himself. However, Yuan had overestimated his support. Even his close supporters and generals were disgusted by his attempt to bring back the monarchy. The provinces thus began to rebel. A 'National Protection Army' was formed in Yunnan to fight Yuan, led by Liang Qichao. **Yunnan declared independence on 25 December. Other southern provinces and provincial leaders followed.** Even though Yuan declared himself the emperor in January 1916, he was forced to renounce the throne in March 1916 due to the significant lack of support. His imperial dreams led the provinces and the leaders they were under to break from the central government, setting a precedent for the warlordism to come after Yuan's death, which came three months after his renouncement of the throne. Thus, Yuan's actions, which included the placing of his generals in positions of power over the provinces especially after the 'Second Revolution', and his attempt to become emperor, which caused the breakaway of provinces from the central government, contributed to the warlordism to come after his death.

However, his attempts to centralize the government under himself, through the abolishment of Parliament and the attempt to install himself as the emperor of China, suggest that he did not intend to cause China to descend into warlordism. Indeed, some modern historians have called him a 'modernising conservative', who attempted to impose administrative reforms based on his recognition that unless there was an effective restoration of strong central authority, China stood little chance of developing the cohesion that would enable it to grow into a modern nation state. Thus, when he delegated power to his generals over the provinces, he did not do so wanting China to be split because of the power struggles of these generals. Despite Yuan's efforts, the history of regionalism in China meant that it was difficult to reimpose the control of the central government on the provinces. Thus, when Yuan announced his intention to become emperor, the provinces boldly broke away from his central government. Ultimately, Yuan's efforts to centralize control under himself failed because central government had not been established for a considerable amount of time, since the 19th century. Then again, the government that Yuan built around himself could only survive with himself being around, and when he died, this system broke down, allowing the competing warlords to fill the power vacuum left. If Yuan is to be blamed for the rise of warlordism, it would be for his attempt at building a government centred around himself only.

Therefore, the increasing regionalism experienced in China since the late Qing period is a more important factor for the rise of warlordism than the presidency of Yuan Shikai. The late Qing period since the mid-19th century saw the weakening of the Qing court's control over China due to the twin challenges from Western encroachment on China, as exemplified by the Opium Wars in the 1840s and 1850s, and the rebellions from within,

the most serious of them all being the Taiping Rebellion which lasted from 1851 to 1864. With this weakening of the Qing court, the imperial court came to rely more and more on the provincial leaders to establish the Qing dynasty's control over China. For example, the Taiping Rebellion saw the Qing court making concessions to the elite group, the gentry, and had permitted the raising of regional armies by two of the outstanding provincial leaders of the time, Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. As time passed, the provincial leaders became more empowered to make decisions independent, and sometimes opposing the court's. During the Boxer Rebellion from 1900 to 1901, the Qing court supported the Boxers rebels, who attacked Westerners, but some of the provincial leaders, especially those in the south whose provinces saw considerable influence of the West, did not follow the Qing position and helped to protect Westerners and Christians from the Boxers. Attempts by the court to re-establish the central authority over the provinces failed. In the wake of the Boxer Rebellion, in response to growing discontent over Qing rule, the court established Provincial Assemblies in 1909 to appease the people, who were seeking more say in the governance of China, and in turn, to maintain the rule of the Qing court. Around the same time, regional armies were established to strengthen the external and internal defence of China, but these led to increasing provincialism. This increasing regionalism had been the accelerant for the 1911 Revolution that severely weakened the Qing court. In Wuchang, soldiers of the regional army mutinied, sparking the revolution on 10 October. Following this example, other regional armies followed, and contributed to the collapse of the Qing dynasty. Thus, even before Yuan became President of the Republic, increasing provincialism since the late 19th century meant that the provinces and their leaders came to have de facto autonomy from the central government, even giving them the power to eventually cause Qing dynasty rule to collapse. This provincialism would also lead to problems for Yuan in his attempts to centralize control over China under himself, and meant that at his death in 1916, he would be unsuccessful at making the provinces to become subservient under a strong central government.

The weakness of the GMD also led to the rise of warlordism. Before 1912, the GMD had its precedents in Sun Yat-Sen's Tongmenghui, and this organization had been able to gain control of the southern provinces of China in the wake of the Wuchang uprising on 10 October 1911. However, in the north, Yuan Shikai and his powerful Beiyang army dominated and Sun had little choice but to cede the Presidency to Yuan if the Qing were to be removed from power, a quid pro quo that Yuan himself had suggested. Thus, even at the start, the precursor to the GMD could not control all of China, and this set the precedent, when in 1916, after Yuan's death, the GMD would be unable to fill in the power vacuum effectively to prevent the rise of warlordism.

During Yuan's presidency, he severely weakened the power of the GMD in the central government and across China. Even though the GMD won the elections in December 1912, and Song Jiaoren, its leader would then become the new premier of the Republic, he was assassinated, likely by Yuan's henchmen, on 20 March. This crippled the power of the GMD in the central government, without a GMD premier to check the president's power. When Yuan negotiated the foreign loans in April 1913, and Parliament objected, Yuan dismissed GMD military governors throughout southern China, which is significant because the south had been the Tongmenghui's, and effectively the GMD's power base. Removing formal rule of the GMD over southern provinces thus significantly weakens the GMD's power. The GMD's attempt at overthrowing Yuan in the 'Second Revolution' was also effectively crushed by Yuan. Later on, in his attempt to centralize the government under himself, he dissolved the GMD on 4 November 1913. This removed almost all GMD influence in the central government, and allowed Yuan to dissolve Parliament. This removed any opportunity for the GMD to establish control over China from the centre, and prevented it from effectively taking over the power of Yuan after his death in 1916 and preventing the rise of warlordism.

Furthermore, the GMD did not have an effective army to enforce the centralization of China under its rule. Indeed, the warlord era taught the GMD that if it wanted to unify China, it had to establish a strong army to be able to subdue the warlords. It was only in 1926 that the Northern Expedition by the GMD succeeded to some degree in unifying a considerable part of China.

However, in the first place, the GMD would have had majority influence in the central government after the December 1912 elections, and may have been in a position to effectively assume power after Yuan's death by building up a power base in the north, had it not been for Yuan's attempt at centralizing the rule of China under himself. In the end, the severe weakening of the GMD was mostly due to Yuan Shikai, and thus Yuan is a more fundamental factor in the rise of warlordism than the weaknesses of the GMD. In turn, the presidency of Yuan is a less important reason for the rise of warlordism than the increasing provincialism that China experienced since the late Qing period.

In conclusion, the increasing regionalism in China since the late 19th century set the precedent for warlordism to appear, and this hampered Yuan's attempts at strengthening the control of the central government over China under himself, which could have potentially reversed the slide into more regionalism, even though Yuan himself contributed to the rise of warlordism by installing his generals into positions of power over the provinces after the failure of the 'Second Revolution', and attempting to install himself as emperor of China which incited provinces to break away from the central government. Hence, the increasing regionalism is a more important factor than

Yuan Shikai in the rise of warlordism. At the same time, the moves of Yuan in strengthening his grip over China severely weakened the GMD, preventing it from effectively taking over the reins of power over the whole of China after Yuan's death, and allowing various warlords to fill in the power vacuum. Thus, Yuan Shikai is a more fundamental reason in the rise of warlordism than the weaknesses of the GMD, which were contributed to greatly by Yuan. In all, the most important reason for the rise of warlordism is the increasing provincialism experience in China since the late Qing period, not Yuan Shikai's rule.

Comments:

The part about the ways in which Yuan Shikai caused the rise of warlordism is too narrative (the exact ways in which Yuan did this were not succinctly presented) and the whole narrative style overshadows the argument, which is presented in the last paragraph (plus, the argument doesn't seem to have been obvious until the last paragraph)