THE MAY THIRTIETH MOVEMENT IN SHANGHAI AND THE LIMITS OF SENTIMENT

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<td>French Town’s Concession Police</td>
<td>FCP</td>
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<td>General Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<td>General Labor Union</td>
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Introduction

The May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 was modern China’s first social movement in which the participants hailed from nearly all sectors of society. Students, Communists, members of the Guomindang Nationalist Party (GMD), businessmen, and workers found unity in the struggle for a sovereign, unified state, free from foreign interference. In Shanghai, these participants went on strike at foreign factories, temporarily closed their own businesses, stopped their schoolwork, protested in the streets, and boycotted foreign goods. In terms of size and economic effectiveness, the Movement’s peak was in June, 1925. However, the effects of the participants’ activities lasted at least until October, 1925. Moreover, since the Movement generated protests nationwide, other cities such as the Guangzhou-Hong Kong region hosted a movement that lasted until October, 1926.

The greatest factor unifying the Movement’s participants were their shared outrage over a shooting incident by the British-led Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) on May 30, 1925, which left eleven student protestors dead. Earlier historians have analyzed the resulting movement as an anti-imperialist, nationalist revolt, which alerted the treaty powers to their precarious position. While the Movement was seen as a failure by some Chinese at the time in that their goal was to “take back the concessions,” its real significance lies in the fact that each group learned to mobilize and advocate for its own economic and political interests.\(^1\) Sometimes these interests and motivations aligned, other times they worked against collective action. Instead of interpreting the Movement as the beginning of the Guomindang’s nationalistic revolution, this

thesis argues it would be more accurate to state that it was an event that highlighted the shifting alliances of an ongoing civil war in China. Unhappy with this status quo, Chinese workers emerged as a force that others could no longer marginalize or fully co-opt.

In acknowledging that the participants had other political and economic motivations in addition to their shared feelings of nationalism and outrage over police violence, this thesis sheds more light on the ad hoc and negotiated nature of participation in the Movement. The result is that feelings of nationalism and outrage, however rational, only partially explain the genesis of the Movement. This complexity suggests that researchers should reconsider narratives that characterize the unification of China in 1928 as a culmination of nationalistic sentiment.

The Movement has its roots in Shanghai’s labor unrest in seven Japanese cotton mills owned by the Nagai Wata company beginning on February 2, 1925. Students from Shanghai University had been teaching mill workers at night schools, and were allegedly incorporating “Bolshevik” ideas into their lessons, agitating the workers and their informal leaders. Apparently after experiencing more labor disputes than usual, on February 2, 1925 the Japanese management fired about 50 workers for arousing “ill-feelings,” and six were then jailed for “intimidation” of the other workers. Already organized as labor unions, the workers mobilized on February 9, holding a 31,000-person strike across seven different factories. In the official report of a diplomatic commission sent from Beijing to investigate the Shanghai-based Movement, a member of the investigative body noted the “swift and organized way in which the strike spread and [that] the [content] used in some of the propaganda and circulars also show[ed] that
supporters of the movement included men of education and organizing ability.”² Later in the week Chinese workers broke into the closed factories, wrecking equipment worth several thousand dollars. On February 15, the workers formed a “mob” and:

proceeded about 7:30 P.M. on that date from Jessfield village to the Toyoda Cotton Mill … and gained an entrance to the premises by scaling a wall. Having intimidated the operatives into discontinuing work, they joined forces with them and assembled outside the gate. They there a short time later attacked a motor car occupied by seven Japanese employees of the mill, including Mr. Harada. This gentleman was beaten about the head with a stick and succumbed to his injuries on the 1st [of] March. One of the others was shot through the chest, and third was beaten and thrown into Soochow creek. The municipal police, who were handicapped through lack of authority to function off the road, finally dispersed the crowd and arrested nine of the rioters.³

Facing an uncompromising management, the laborers resumed work on March 1, not having achieved their primary economic goals. Seemingly emboldened by the size of the strike, workers “intensified their activities and organised meetings at frequent intervals.”⁴ While few have covered the period between February and May, historians Martin Frazier and Jeffrey


³ Ibid, 122.

⁴ Ibid.
Wasserstrom connect the two periods of unrest by respectively focusing on factory foremen and student efforts to influence the workers. While one cannot deny that these groups influenced events, labor unrest had not effectively changed during this period. Indeed, worker disputes and strikes were a common theme in Shanghai. A better approach to understanding the period is to focus on worker agency. Attributing agency to the workers who stood to benefit most from improved working conditions and higher wages is at once a more parsimonious and a less paternalistic approach than those that focus primarily on outside actors’ efforts to raise worker consciousness.

Workers at the Nagai Wata cotton mills struck again on May 4 and May 7. These short stoppages were effective because most of the mills mutually supported each other in the production process, and consequently were in the same compound. Thus, a strike at one mill could potentially affect production at another, as well as generate awareness in other workers. These short-lived strikes resulted in the “discharge of two depraved workmen,” and the resignation of five other workers in protest. The latter group assaulted a foreman, who they believed to be the source of their friends’ dismissal, and were then jailed. An investigator at the Putou Road police station determined that at least one of the workers was “without a doubt an instigator.” The Japanese management decided to discharge all five men in order to improve the “general discipline of its workmen.” This decision almost immediately backfired.

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5 Martin W. Frazier, "Mobilizing a Movement: Cotton Mill Foremen in the Shanghai Strikes of 1925,” in Republican China 20, no. 1 (1994), 36. By analyzing political orientations of different labor unions and gangs, Frazier highlights the local inter-group competition in an argument against nationalism being workers’ main motivation.

6 “Appendix VIII to Enclosure 1, Report by Japanese Member of Commission on Events leading up to Riot on May 15 in Nagai Wata Kaisha Mill,” in “Despatch no. 470 dated July 6, 1925 from Mr. Palairat at the British Legation in Peking to Mr Austen Chamberlain at the Foreign Office in London,” [FO371/10946 (1925): F3917/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 119-120.
In a display of solidarity employees at Mill No. 12 decided to stop working. Insofar as these workers were in charge of spinning the yarn that would be delivered to Mill No. 7 for the weaving of fabric, the whole Nagai Wata operation was in financial jeopardy. The management decided to close down some of its other mills in order to prevent wasted man-hours and inefficient backlogs. Despite explaining the rationale to its other workers and promising half-pay as compensation, these workers demanded full pay. On May 15, both groups refused to acquiesce. Later that day some workers gained entry to the weaving mill (Mill No. 7), which had been shuttered. Once inside, they fashioned makeshift weapons out of three-foot-long wooden clubs, which were part of the machinery, and began brandishing them at Japanese and Sikh constables who had recently appeared at the gate of the mill, presumably responding to the unrest. In the ensuing melee, the Sikh constables and Japanese factory guards fired shots, purportedly in self-defense. This gunfire wounded six workers and ultimately killed one worker named Gu Zhenghong. 1500 laborers still at work at Mill No. 5 in the compound, becoming aware the violence, rushed to join the “scuffles.” Before the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) could quell the riot, the crowd caused an estimated 50,000 taels in damage.\footnote{7 Ibid.}

The next day, mill workers and their student allies began planning further strikes, a memorial service for Gu Zhenghong, and a demonstration to be held on May 30, in order to spread awareness of what was happening in the Japanese cotton mills and the city in general. The Shanghai Municipal Police arrested some of the students assisting the workers, further exacerbating the situation leading up to Saturday, May 30. On that day, while many foreigners were at a semi-annual horse race held at the Shanghai Race Club, students and workers flooded
the streets with politically charged pamphlets and posters. Around mid-day, the student protestors gathered around Louza Police Station where their friends were being held. At one point students demanded that they be released, causing a disturbance in the station. Once outside again, the crowd continued to grow until approximately two thousand people crowded the intersection. Around 3.00 p.m., the officer in charge, Inspector Everson, along with his small detachment of Sikh and Chinese constables, ordered the crowd to disperse. Instead of dispersing, the crowd grew in size, and conversation became difficult as the Chinese began to push in closer and to shout “Kill the Foreigners” at the police. A few minutes after 3:30 p.m., and feeling threatened by the increasingly “ugly” and unruly “mob,” Inspector Everson shouted—largely inaudibly—in English and then in Mandarin, warning them that his constables would open fire if they did not heed his final warning. Ten seconds later, he ordered his men to fire, and seven students were shot and immediately killed. Four more of the wounded later died. In shock, the crowd quickly dispersed, and workers and students met to determine what to do next.8

The deaths of eleven students exposed both the International Settlement’s underlying tensions, and the growing unrest within the Chinese community. On May 31, the eve of the anniversary of the Boxer Rebellion, and shortly after the fifth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, over 1500 Chinese met at the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce (GCC) for an emergency session.9 Those present represented factory unions, small shop owners, larger

8 “Appendix VII to Enclosure 1, Résumé of the Incidents of May 30, June 1 and June 2, 1925,” in “Despatch no. 470 dated July 6, 1925 from Mr. Palaiiret at the British Legation in Peking to Mr Austen Chamberlain at the Foreign Office in London,” [FO371/10946 (1925): F3917/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 117-118.

businesses, and compradors who worked as business agents for foreigners. Protesters recounted the incident to the various groups, and exhorted all present to join them in collective action against the imperialists. However, not all parties were initially willing to help. Businessmen and workers needed convincing, since they arguably would be risking their livelihoods. Deciding on collective action depended on appealing to the shared grievances of disparate groups. The semi-colonial conditions that foreign imperialists depended on may have provided such unity. Many Chinese felt that foreigners infringed on the independence of their state by keeping wages brutally low, repressing labor organizations, ignoring Chinese laws, encouraging the civil war by backing competing groups, maintaining control of the tariff rates, and benefiting from an extraterritorial court system imposed on them under the guise of Western modernity. A consensus did eventually emerge that night, and the GCC ultimately declared a Sanba: a triple stoppage of schools, businesses, and factories. They then developed rules for the Sanba and established a General Labor Union (GLU) in order to coordinate with workers and disburse strike funds.

On June 1, over 100,000 Chinese participated in the Sanba, alarming most foreign residents in the International Settlement. The British-led SMC declared a state of emergency on June 1, calling up its Volunteer Corps of 1750 Westerners, and requesting 2000 additional troops from treaty powers Great Britain, France, the United States, Japan, and Italy. The Movement


manifested itself in street demonstrations, strikes, and, later, boycotts of foreign goods, especially those that were Japanese or British.  

The first week of June—the first week after the strike began—saw sympathy demonstrations in several major cities, including Beijing (Beiping), Nanjing, Wuchang, and Changsha. In Shanghai, the SMC’s “Volunteers,” dressed in khakis, carried machine guns, and put up wire obstacles, evoking the previous decade’s World War, while they waited for reinforcement. Perceiving a nationwide threat, Britain, Japan, Italy, and the United States sent a total of 22 warships, carrying over 1300 sailors and marines, to Shanghai alone. Great Britain saw a need for a strong and united response in order to reinforce the “prestige of the powers” which they believed to be critical to maintaining the treaty system. Great Britain called upon the United States and Japan to do the same. However, most nations, other than Great Britain, limited their forces’ official missions to protecting their respective citizens and their property. Other treaty-ports also received reinforcement, albeit to a much smaller degree. On June 3, the Beijing government’s Foreign Office, the Waijiao bu, sent the first of several notes to the treaty


14 Rigby, The May 30 Movement, 63. By the end of the June, over 38 towns had taken part in the Movement.


17 Japan Foreign Ministry Archives (JFMA), 5.3.2.155-1, III, 1831, “Yada to Shidehara, no. 629-1, July 11, 1925,” as quoted in Harumi Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1995), 21. Sir Charles Eliot, the British Ambassador to Japan, used this phrase in conversation with Foreign Minister Shidehara on July 7th. Despite the later date, it reveals the British rationale for a firm response to the Movement.
powers’ foreign ministers (hereafter Diplomatic Body). The Waijiao bu’s note officially protested the incident, stating that “no matter what the nature of their demonstration may have been, the students, being young men of good family, full of patriotism and unarmed, should not be treated, no matter what the circumstances, as ordinary law breakers and criminals.” The following day, the Diplomatic Body replied collectively to this first note, “deploring” the incident, but explaining that the SMP’s response of shooting the protesters was necessary, since the crowd of workers and students would not disperse.

The Waijiao bu then sent a second note protesting the violent response of the treaty powers in early June. Meanwhile, the GCC, GLU, and various students’ unions met again, officially declaring a boycott of Japanese and British goods. The GCC preferred to act as a mediating body, and therefore formed a United Society of Workers, Merchants and Students (“United Society”) to “act as a central agency for the direction of the movement.” The GLU and United Society would come under Communist influence, but were not completely in lockstep with their policies. Indeed, in an internal Chinese Communist Party (“CCP”) document, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), co-founder of the CCP, describes how the bourgeoisie later demonstrated a “tendency toward leadership of the movement, especially in Shanghai.”

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19 Clifford, Shanghai, 1925, 23.

20 Chen Duxiu, “Political Report of the CC,” July 1926, as quoted in The Rise to Power of the Communist Party, ed. Tony Saich (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 169-174 and n92. Saich describes in the footnote that Wilbur and How’s translation states that the “The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai was, in reality, led by the General Chamber Commerce and not the General Labor Union.” Power and control ebb and flow during movements. There is rarely consensus, and one should view decisions as compromises of the disparate stakeholders.
On June 7, the United Society sent the May Thirtieth Movement’s initial list of four preliminary and thirteen formal demands to both the Waijiao bu and the Diplomatic Body in Beijing. The beginning of negotiations was supposed to be contingent upon the treaty powers meeting the first four preliminary demands, which were: cancellation of the state of emergency, demobilization of the Volunteer Corps and other forces, release of those arrested, and opening of occupied schools. The list of formal demands specifically sought suspension and trials for the policemen, redress for the families of the slain, a formal apology, replacement of some members on the Council, freedom of speech, better treatment of workers, the right to unionize, appointment of a Chinese Commissioner of Police, cancellation of proposed bylaws, no further extension of foreign roads outside the settlement, control of the Mixed Court returned to the Chinese, Chinese eligibility to sit on the Council, abolition of extraterritoriality, and withdrawal of British and Japanese gunboats. Both the Waijiao bu and the Diplomatic Body decided to send envoys to Shanghai, on June 7 and 9, respectively, in order investigate the shooting incident. Once in Shanghai, both groups of investigators agreed to discuss the preliminary demands and the incident itself. Since the treaty powers desired to separate the issue of the shooting incident from its associated political demands, and because the Chinese mediators from the GCC were unwilling to accept that the Chinese police were partly to blame (for not protecting foreign-owned property), negotiations ended in stalemate on June 18.21

Meanwhile, although technically illegal in Shanghai, workers’ unions gradually began their strikes, evidently heeding the calls of the United Society and GLU. On June 8th, the Shanghai Seamen’s Union declared its strike, which was significant because it prevented foreign

goods from leaving warehouses for transport along the coast and interior of China. Even if Chinese consumers wanted to disobey the boycott, foreign goods were increasingly unavailable for purchase. Moreover, at this time, most schools, shops, and factories had been closed in Shanghai.22

On June 10, the GCC, which had been quietly meeting with Chinese elites, presumably sent by the Beijing government, decided to negotiate an end to the Sanba. Since the United Society opposed this move, the GCC formed its own May Thirtieth Committee to direct the Movement. While data is unavailable, the Sanba would have been difficult for the GCC to continue endorsing because it was their shops that were closed, their loss of revenue, and mostly their private funds sustaining the strikes. Of note, the GCC received donations from many Chinese throughout the country, and even from as far away as the Manila Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps due to the growing split between the GCC and United Society, students and Communists also collected funds to distribute on behalf of the latter group.23

In addition to the political negotiations, Shanghai’s Mixed Court held its trial of the protestors involved in the shooting incident on June 9 to 11. The evidence presented by witnesses tended to confirm the Chinese protestors’ version of the incident. The protest had been peaceful and the shooting unwarranted. The American Assessor decided to acquit the defendants so long as they signed a pledge to “keep the peace.” The policemen involved were not on trial, and none were detained for questioning as a result of the evidence presented during the protestors’ trials. A


judicial inquiry would not occur until months later, after U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg (1856-1937) called on the international community to investigate.24

On June 13, the GCC published a reduced set of demands. The demands tellingly left out by the businessmen were related to trade union rights, the return of control of the Mixed Court, the abolition of extraterritoriality, and the evacuation of foreign gunboats.25 To help curb unrest, Marshall Zhang Zuolin (1875-1928) also dispatched 7,000 troops from Fengtian to establish martial law in the “native area to check … demonstrations.”26 This would bring the military and police forces in Shanghai to roughly 13,000 men, who were supposed to keep the peace between ~810,000 Chinese and 30,000 foreigners living in Shanghai.27 On June 19, a Guangzhou-Hong Kong sympathy strike began, only to evolve into its own 16 month-long movement after the British killed over 50 demonstrators on Shamian island on June 23.28 This was the largest of many shooting incidents taking place across the country. Chinese residents were not completely innocent, as protesters may have provoked some of the incidents. Moreover, there were regular assaults on foreigners, especially the Japanese.29

24 Clifford, Shanghai, 1925, 24. A breach of peace was a punishable offense under Settlement’s regulations. Thus, the SMP could arrest anyone taking part in demonstrations or strikes.

25 “Chinese Mediation Body Voices Demands; Hears Views of Strike Officials.”

26 “Martial Law in Shanghai: 7,000 Chinese Troops Keep Order in the Native Areas,” New York Times, June 23, 1925 (Accessed February 28, 2015). The general was one of many regional “warlords” that sought to unify China at this time.


28 The Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike is more commonly known as the Canton-Hong Kong strike.

After a final nationwide Sanba on June 25, in protest of the massacre in Guangzhou (Canton), the Shanghai GCC declared an end to their Sanba. On June 26, Chinese businessmen in Shanghai opened their shops, and resumed movement of domestic goods to the interior. Consequently, Chinese businesses and manufacturers began making a tremendous amount of profit at the expense of the Japan and Britain. Thus, by avoiding a prolonged Sanba and by funding worker strikes at their foreign competitors’ factories, Chinese businessmen greatly benefited from belonging to the Movement. While the triple stoppage was over, the strike and boycott persisted.

Apparently in retaliation for the persisting strikes, the British-run Shanghai Electrical Department, whose Chinese employees were on strike, cut power to Chinese textile mills in the city on July 4 and 7. Chinese textile mills, heretofore profiting from the strike and boycott, had to end production. This loss of revenue placed increasing pressure on the GCC to end some of the strikes. The businessmen decided to focus the Movement’s efforts on Great Britain. While one could assume that this decision was an obvious one, given that the British-led Shanghai Municipal Police were largely responsible for the May 30 incident, the situation was much more complex, as it involved interregional conflict between the Beijing government and the GMD and threatened the unity of the treaty powers.

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On July 22, Yu Xiaqing (1863-1945), the president of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, helped mediate negotiations between the workers and management at the Japanese textile mills, reaching a successful settlement on August 11.\(^{33}\) Japan’s unilateral settlement took Britain by surprise. The latter attempted to enforce treaty power solidarity by withholding electricity.\(^{34}\) Despite the issue of electricity for the Japanese mills, the settlement set in motion a flurry of labor negotiations across the city. To be clear, workers decided when to settle their strikes. They also had educated Chinese help mediate in most cases. Moreover, we can assume that the GCC applied a significant amount of pressure, given that it cost $200,000 a month to sustain the Movement.\(^{35}\) The resumption of work partially eased tensions in the city, and, on August 28, the Shanghai Municipal Council officially canceled its state of emergency and demobilized its volunteers.

On September 10, the electricity began to flow to the Japanese mills, among many other factories, and the boycott gradually abated. The General Trade Union closed down on September 18, and even workers at British firms began returning to work in late September.\(^{36}\) Only British

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\(^{34}\) This narrative simplifies the electricity issue. The Electricity Department would either have to settle with its own workers on strike or train more replacements. The Department had sufficient power and workers to power essential services. The Japanese even offered to provide workers, which the British declined in an effort to force Japan’s cooperation.


\(^{36}\) That workers were willing to settle strikes with the British too, suggests that they had their own motivations beyond feelings of nationalism or, perhaps, their ability to maintain a strike was strongly associated with the GCC’s willingness to sponsor them. Workers’ piecemeal return to work further highlights the United Society’s lack of control over labor and perhaps insufficient funds to bridge the gap left by the GCC’s decreasing support.
American Tobacco Company factories stayed closed until October 10. The following week an international judicial inquiry commenced. On January 2, 1926, the inquiry published inconclusive findings due to a lack of consensus among the American, British and Japanese judges.

Ultimately, contemporary Chinese accounts depicted the May Thirtieth Movement as a “defeat,” and reported that the local community felt “gloom” and “despair” since very few of the protestors demands had been met a year after the Movement. From a Western perspective, it had the effect of generating two special international commissions to reconsider “existing treaties” regarding tariff autonomy and extraterritoriality in 1925 and 1926, respectively. The most significant American congressional action following the May Thirtieth Movement was House Concurrent Resolution 46, also known as the Porter Resolution of 1927. The resolution urged President John Calvin Coolidge Jr. (1872-1933) to act independently of the other powers, so that “henceforth the treaty relations between the two countries shall be upon an equitable and reciprocal basis and will be such as will in no way offend the sovereign dignity of either of the parties.” After the resolution’s referral to the Senate, the Committee on Foreign Relations did not act on the Porter Resolution, effectively ending the debate. Some of the testimony


presented, and the ongoing civil war in China, created obstacles to change of the status quo. These included the lack of a unified China under one national government, an ongoing civil war, fear of Communist influence in the Guomindang Nationalist Party (GMD), frequent danger to foreigners living in the concessions, and the lack of a judicial system that met Western legal standards.42

After the GMD’s unification of China following its Northern Expedition in 1926-1928, the U.S. State Department negotiated with the Nanjing government, agreeing to complete tariff autonomy no later than January 1, 1929. During this same period, in a process historian Turan Kayaoglu calls “domestic legalization,” Chinese intellectuals and officials focused on building institutions, adopting policies, and establishing conditions necessary for a sovereign China. Besides the Nanjing government’s reforms, and seemingly in response to the Report of the Commission on Extraterritoriality in China, Chinese elites entered into a political discourse with the West and Japan about the abolition of extraterritoriality.43 While analyzing that discourse is beyond the scope of this paper, the Nanjing government was committed to making changes in order to stabilize the country. However, the government was also uninterested in waiting for equal treaty relations with the international community, as it unilaterally abolished


extraterritoriality in 1930. The United States and most other states would not actually recognize this decree until 1943, a full hundred years after China signed its first “unequal treaty.”

The May 30 incident was a complicated crisis that presented opportunities for the participants involved. Students, who may have been inspired by China’s May Fourth Movement, wanted an end to the unequal treaties and a reestablishment of China’s sovereignty. They educated those around them, enforced the boycott, collected donations, created propaganda, and filled the streets during sympathy strikes. Like the students, the GMD and the CCP wanted to unify the country by driving out the imperialists and defeating the warlords, which they believed included the current Provisional Government in Beijing. The CCP also hoped to make further inroads among the working class. They facilitated the Movement by organizing workers across skill-sets, providing funds, enforcing strikes and boycotts, and being fervently opposed to compromise. In the eyes of the treaty powers, workers were a new, frightening addition to national-level politics. Thus, even at the time, everyone recognized the special nature, threat, and opportunity presented by the Movement.

When briefly describing the Movement, historians often cite the Movement’s popular anti-imperialist aims as evidence of the emergence of nationalism, as the Chinese collectively demanded an end to their semi-colonial conditions. That many Chinese participated in protests,

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46 Perry, Shanghai on Strike, 40. Perry argues that workers and guilds had a history of labor activism and were not apolitical. Nevertheless, the British were especially surprised by 100,000+ workers on strike and in the streets.
boycotts and strikes reinforces this conclusion, especially since it immediately preceded the GMD’s Northern Expedition, which united China in 1928. Historians Peter Zarrow and S.A. Smith contributed significantly to this line of reasoning in that they explain how Chinese nationalism evolved during China’s early Republican period. Recognizing that there were competing ideas of what the post-Qing state was supposed to be and also how they should get there, S.A. Smith concluded that the concept in the 1920s was still evolving and was best described as “protonationalism.” Smith further asserts that nationalism and class identity were interchangeably used and understood by most Chinese from 1925-1927. Peter Zarrow contributed to the understanding of Chinese nationalism by tracing its evolution from the mystical statism of the Confucians to anti-Manchu claims of Han centrality, and finally to a turn towards an “anti-imperialist nationalism [which] took for granted the construction of the nation-state.” In other words, the Chinese may not have agreed on what they wanted in a Chinese state, but knew that they did not want foreign imperialism. Perhaps recognizing the complexity and futility of defining what Chinese nationalism was, Prasenjit Duara points out that national identities are never coherent, have competing elements, and “contested meanings.”

The task of determining what the May Thirtieth Movement represents has inhibited more granular analysis of the more immediate motivations and agency of its participants. By exploring the competing motivations and related actions of key participants we can better understand the

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49 Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 230.
event, and better critique explanations that center on anti-imperialist nationalism. When
describing the time period, nationalism tends to overshadow other themes such as business
opportunity, labor conditions, or Chinese politics. Historians tend to treat these themes in longer
timeframes in order to show the evolution of business, formation of a specific class or network,
or as part of grand narrative recounting the Chinese revolution. For example, historian Jean
Chesneaux detailed the formation, composition, and decline of the Chinese labor movement. By
concentrating on the collective action of workers, he argued against claims that the CCP led and
directed the Movement.\(^5^0\) Marie-Claire Bergère focused on the Chinese bourgeoisie, contending
that they formed a self-regulating “civil society,” absent any dependence on the state.\(^5^1\) In this
line of reasoning, the May 30th Movement was essentially a manifestation of a nonexistent state-
society relationship. This interpretation unfortunately obscures some aspects of the civil war.
Namely, the competition between the Nationalist in the South and the Beijing Provisional
Government in the North. Xu Xiaoqun, among others, points to a more “symbiotic” relationship
with state power where members of society develop collective identity and take action because
of the presence of the state.\(^5^2\)

Without denying the presence of the Chinese state, and the importance of Chinese
nationalism during the Movement, and by focusing on the smaller, component narratives, this
thesis argues that businessmen and workers also participated in the Movement for local reasons.


\(^5^1\) Marie-Claire Bergère, “Civil Society and Urban Change in Republican China,” in Reappraising Republican

Moreover, the Movement’s members unknowingly participated in a geopolitical state formation process taking place between the Beijing government in northern China and the GMD in southern China.

By using sources such as foreign diplomatic documents, intelligence files, “big character” posters, English-language local newspapers, demographics, strike and boycott data, municipal regulations, and translated worker statements from secondary sources, this thesis emphasizes the local conditions that led to the beginning of the Movement, how participants and their opponents responded to each other, and how the Movement ultimately ended. Chapter 1 analyzes the origins of the informal alliance of the Movement’s participants, highlighting the role of businessmen whose money enabled the extended participation of workers in the Movement. I seek to explain why Chinese businessmen would risk so much when they already profited from a normally well-controlled labor pool. By focusing on their public opposition to various proposed changes to the city’s bylaws, I challenge the notion that anti-imperialism was their main motive. Chapter 2 contextualizes the workers’ motivations for participating in the Movement by considering the everyday violence of working in Shanghai and the workers’ difficulty in organizing themselves. I emphasize the role of strike pay in promoting the Movement, and in sustaining their unlikely alliance with Chinese businessmen. I also compare and contrast labor conditions in local British and Chinese tobacco factories in order to highlight how poor working conditions were, independent of nationality. In so doing I challenge the notion that foreign factories were more exploitive than those that were locally-owned. Chapter 3 explores the nuances of Chinese nationalism, as played out in the Movement’s gradual shift from targeting all imperialists to solely focusing on Great Britain. I demonstrate how the competing economic
motivations of different groups affected the anti-imperialist agenda. I also seek to contextualize the shifts as part of the civil war between the Beijing Provisional Government and the Guomindang Nationalist party. My conclusion briefly summarizes the most important parts of my thesis, discusses the practical reasons for participating in the Movement, and interprets the event as part of an ongoing Chinese civil war, rather than as a unified response against imperialism.
Chapter 1

Semi-Colonialism in Shanghai: Its Structure and Political Implications

Traditionally historians depicted the May Thirtieth Movement as a nationalist, anti-imperialist social movement that began in Shanghai and spread throughout the country in June 1925. The spark of the Movement was an incident between the SMP and student protestors. The SMP, who were led by the British, and were mostly composed of Sikh and Chinese constables, shot eleven students who were primarily protesting the killing of a worker in a Japanese cotton mill. News of the massacre traveled fast. The following day students, Communists, workers, and businessmen came together to express outrage over a shooting incident on May 30, 1925. On May 31st, a meeting at the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce (GCC), this group decided to employ a familiar technique called a Sanba or triple stoppage of the schools, businesses, and factories. These allied forces also formed a General Labor Union and a United Society to help facilitate the May Thirtieth Movement and to present their demands. Among four preliminary and thirteen formal demands, the most significant were the demands focusing on justice for the dead protestors, increased influence in the International Settlement’s governance, and the abolition of extraterritoriality.

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From May to October 1925, students, workers, businesses, consumers, and Communists in at least thirty-eight other cities and towns held demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts. Students stopped going to school and helped organize the Movement by creating pamphlets, raising funds, and enforcing a boycott. Workers went on strike for months with Chinese businessmen helping fund their efforts. Armed pickets enforced the boycott by preventing the movement of foreign goods from docks and wharves. Shanghai shopkeepers even kept their businesses closed for most of June. Commerce briefly came to a standstill. Protests sprang up across the country against Japan, Britain, and foreigners in general. As the main target, Great Britain experienced a decrease of 31% in total export value from 1924 to 1925. Britain’s Commercial Secretary in Shanghai, H.J. Brett, reported to the Foreign Office that provincial taxes on goods surged to 40% and higher, rendering trade “almost impossible.”

Although it greatly expanded the Chinese labor movement, and contributed to the ten-fold growth of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its aim of taking back the concessions ultimately failed. While the event is rightly characterized as a nationalistic movement that

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56 Rigby, The May 30 Movement, 169 and 215. CCP membership increased from roughly 3,000 in 1925 to 30,000 in 1926. Though technically illegal, labor union membership in China grew from 540,000 to 1.24 million in this same period. Guangzhou (Canton) was also a major hub of the Movement though it started and ended semi-independently of Shanghai’s own movement. Since the Guomindang (GMD) was based in Guangzhou its influence among the city’s elite and unions was arguably greater than in Shanghai.

57 C.F. Remer, A Study of Chinese Boycotts With Special Reference to Their Economic Effectiveness, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 30 & 114. Japan initially experienced a similar decrease in exports, but seemed to have benefited from Great Britain’s losses as their total export value rose by 28.1%. The Movement’s focus shifted from all imperial powers to targeting Great Britain and some American products.

58 “Despatch no. 113, dated November 6, 1925 from Mr. Brett to Mr. Austen Chamberlain,” [F5410/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 306.

failed to accomplish its immediate goals, the factors that inspired and unified its participants were local ones that impacted the entire country. Specifically, the Shanghai Municipal Council’s proposed expansion of the city’s bylaws, Chinese business opportunism, the lack of Chinese influence in the government, and the shocking violence unified Chinese businessmen and workers in an informal alliance long enough to generate a nationwide challenge to the status-quo. 

As its “Take Back the Concessions” rallying cry suggests, the Movement put on display the underlying historical tensions between the Chinese and the foreigners doing business in China’s treaty ports. One basis of this relationship was the principle of extraterritoriality: foreigners followed the civil and criminal laws of the concessions and could not be tried in Chinese courts for crimes committed in China. Instead, their criminal and civil cases would be within the jurisdiction of a system of consular courts headed by their own countrymen and based on Western legal principles. Eileen P. Scully explains that this gave “foreigners in China something of a ‘Midas touch,’ allowing them to extend their privileges and immunities to employees, protégés, institutions, businesses, and the land.”

China’s defeat in the First Opium War, culminating in the signing of the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, marked the beginning of this unequal power relationship with the West. One special provision of this treaty was known as extraterritoriality. Extraterritoriality had both European and Chinese antecedents. The European origins of extraterritoriality stem from treaty provisions known as the “Capitulations,” with the Ottoman Empire granting European powers, particularly France, the privilege of being tried under their own laws instead of Islamic

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ones. Provisions of this nature were also typical of the traditional Chinese foreign policy named 
qi mi meaning “loose rein.” By using “barbarians to control barbarians,” China let foreigners 
resolve their own issues even when in their country. The rationale of this technique was that 
foreigners would be occupied with each other’s economic competition, thereby reducing 
potential interference in the domestic affairs of China proper. According to Warren Cohen “the 
fact that consular jurisdiction infringed on Chinese sovereignty and was not a practice 
incorporated in relations among equals in the West did not bother the mandarins in 
midcentury.” The unforeseen consequence of this treaty provision was that China could not 
limit its effects to China’s northern frontier areas, due to the presence of Westerners eager to 
exercise free trade along its coastline who also had the legal and military backing of the West.

The United States soon gained the same rights with the ratification of the bilateral 
Treaty of Wangxia of 1844. By 1860, and after the Second Opium War, Britain, France, the U.S., 
and Russia all had concluded treaties whose provisions granted them extraterritoriality, tariff rate 
autonomy, freedom to trade, and most favored nation treatment. As John K. Fairbank notes, the

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64 John King Fairbank, China: A New History (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 200-201. A recent example he cites is the Manchu Treaty of Kokand of 1835. A modern example outside of diplomatic immunity might be the Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) that the US military has with the Republic of Korea and Japan, among others. A SOFA is generally used as an American precondition for stationing its forces abroad. Failure to secure a SOFA was the reason the US military left Iraq, and though many suggest the US did not try hard enough to secure a SOFA, there is no dispute that securing a SOFA was a necessary precondition for continued US military presence.
treaties were “quite unequal” because they placed China in a weaker negotiating position, opening China to Western commerce, and the international system.\footnote{Ibid., 200-205.} A treaty provision given to one country became a benefit to all others. In other words, it was as if China were negotiating with the rest of the world all at once. Thus, the “unequal treaties were a defeat that grew bigger over time.”\footnote{Ibid., 201.}

Shanghai’s municipal governance was based mostly on a land use agreement containing a constitution that the local Chinese and foreign consuls finalized between 1864 and 1869, rather than the general provisions of various treaties concluded prior to these dates. In other words, diplomats concluded broad treaties, and local officials developed the finer details of running an international city, apparently with little oversight. According to one typical Chinese argument, because their state never formally approved these “Land Regulations,” all of Shanghai and its foreign concessions still legally belonged to it even if foreigners could own property. The Council argued that the Chinese had acquiesced the governance of the settlement over the years since they were incapable of protecting foreigners and their property. This argument’s tenuous legal basis and its enforcement through the Shanghai Municipal Police created an uneasy relationship dependent on the cooperation of the Chinese.\footnote{Ibid.} Moreover, the local and independent nature of the Council created jurisdictional conflict between them and their diplomats in Beijing, a point that historian Nicholas Clifford highlights in his study of the Movement.\footnote{Clifford, \textit{Shanghai, 1925}, 2.}

\footnote{Clifford, \textit{Shanghai, 1925}, 2.}

\footnote{Ibid., 44.}
By 1925 Shanghai was complex both geographically and in terms of governance. Totaling nine square miles, it had several Chinese districts, including an old walled city, a French Settlement, and the International Settlement, a merger of the old British and American settlements. The Japanese lived within the International Settlement in a neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. Thus, the foreign presence was unavoidable for the local Chinese. Moreover, the Chinese had little influence and no effective representation in the Settlement’s governance. The exception proving this rule was the old Chinese city, which had its own municipal government, and a Chinese mayor appointed by the state. 69

Unfortunately, the best-paying and more abundant source of jobs was the International Settlement. The government outside the Chinese area was led by elected members of the SMC. These leaders came from a small pool of foreign men who paid taxes and belonged to what was known as the Ratepayers Association. 70 The Board of Directors of the Foreign Ratepayer’s Association ratified the decisions of the Council and had nine sitting members. The board consisted of six Englishmen, two Japanese, and one American. Thus, although the Chinese paid 70% of taxes they only had a few men who advised this board and no official representation on the Council. The Foreign consuls handled all criminal and civil matters, including taxation of foreigners belonging to treaty powers that claimed extraterritoriality (e.g., Great Britain). For the Chinese and foreigners belonging to non-treaty powers such as Germany and the Soviet Union, Shanghai’s Mixed Court adjudicated all criminal and civil claims. 71

69 Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31, 3.

70 The Japanese also had their own ratepayers association, though they could vote in the Western one. However, the Western ratepayers association conducted its business in English making Japanese participation difficult.

Chinese magistrate who functioned more as a figurehead than as a judge due to the heavy influence of “foreign assessors” who ensured that they examined “the merits of the case, and decide it equitably.”

Historian Nicholas Clifford finds that they “practically decided cases even when no foreigners or foreign interests were involved.” Thus, the Chinese most likely felt a frustrating lack of control in their lives due to their minimal influence in government. Besides this utter lack of representation in municipal governance, violence and coercion played frequent roles in workers’ lives.

Violence and coercion were a normal occurrence in Shanghai. Workers experienced it frequently in the factories and especially when on strike. One example of daily violence indirectly associated with the Movement was a two-week-long strike at the Nagai Wata cotton mills in February 1925, during which a crowd of Chinese workers got into a dispute with the Japanese management. This disturbance ended when the Chinese police detained about fifty workers, only to have the local police station attacked by 700 Chinese seeking their release. In cases involving Western businesses, however, the SMP were the ones breaking up strikes in order to protect factory property, and to limit “breaches of peace [and] tranquility.” In one case, the

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SMP quickly moved to stop a wave of strikes at BAT factories in 1922 by arresting four female leaders for “disturbing the peace,” who Shanghai’s Mixed Court then fined the equivalent of a week’s pay.76

Foreigners were not the only ones involved in policing workers. The Chinese government actively participated in controlling the labor pool. For example, three weeks after the Movement began, Marshall Zhang Zuolin (1875-1928) dispatched 7,000 troops from Fengtian to establish martial law in the “native area to check … demonstrations.”77 While many archival sources depict workers as the aggressors, their actions should be seen as a response to their labor conditions. Moreover, since many of the English-language newspapers detailing labor disputes favored businessmen over laborers, journalists depicted the latter group as unreasonable agitators without legitimate concerns. While they may have resorted to violence, it was one of the few viable methods of compelling change, since labor unions were illegal and effective strike tactics deemed breaches of the peace. On the whole, the state actively used violence and legal coercion to repress labor organizing, strikes, and demonstrations.

Although Shanghai’s violent semi-colonial condition served as political kindling for many Chinese, the Movement’s immediate sparks were two connected events. First, the killing of a factory worker named Gu Zhenghong in mid-May at the same Japanese owned Nagai Wata cotton mills. Second, the shooting deaths of eleven students protesting in his memory by Sikh


77 “Martial Law in Shanghai: 7,000 Chinese Troops Keep Order in the Native Areas,” New York Times, June 23, 1925. (Accessed February 28, 2015). The general was one of many regional “warlords” that sought to unify China at this time.
and Chinese constables belonging to the British-led Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) on May 30, 1925.

One contemporary English language account of protests occurring on May 15, 1925, deemed an “ugly demonstration,” appeared in Shanghai’s local British newspaper, The North-China Herald, detailing an event which took place at the Nagai Wata cotton mills, explained:

After 5 o’clock in the evening, [Japanese cotton] mills Nos. 7 and 12 which have not been in operation for some days, were visited by [Chinese workers] who demanded [that the gates be opened]. … The operatives succeeded in getting through the barrier at one of the mills. The mob attacked the Japanese with parts of the machinery and the latter retaliated by firing on them, with the result that seven Chinese were injured [one worker named Gu Zhenghong later dying]. … 200 infuriated Chinese mill workers … now rushed No. 5 mill, but they were prevented from entering the property by the police, whereupon they turned round on the latter, and in a hand-to-hand tussle attempted to obtain possession of the Sikh’s carbines, shouting ‘We want your carbines to shoot the Japanese.’ In a few minutes the police proved the victors. … After two shots had been fired into the air the crowd became quieter and after some persuasion dispersed.\(^\text{78}\)

\(^{78}\) “Riot at Japanese Cotton Mill: Ugly Demonstration: Attempts to Wreck Machinery: Shots Fired: Quiet Late at Night,” in *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*, May 23, 1925, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. (Accessed November 5, 2015). This paper was a weekly version of its sister publication *The North China Daily News*. Both are conservative British papers published in English written for a British audience in Shanghai. In *Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31*, Harumi Goto-Shibata, notes that the official SMP policy was that warning shots were not allowed, and that there was a shoot-to-kill policy.
A week later, on May 24, 1925, university students held a memorial for Gu Zhenghong. The SMP arrested four student leaders for this event, which further outraged the protesters. At some point the decision was made to hold an event the following Saturday, on May 30, 1925. Both the Guomindang Nationalist Party (GMD) and CCP claim to have made the decision to organize the students who had gathered on May 30th. Because of the symbolism of the Movement to both groups this was an important and seemingly insoluble dispute. Since Sun Yat-sen agreed in 1923 to allow CCP members to join the GMD, as part of the First United Front, in exchange for Soviet money and military advisors, perhaps it is a moot point. Thus, it is better to focus on why each group participated.

Social movements are not usually monolithic in nature despite the human tendency to remember them that way. Indeed, Nancey Whittier explains that “social movements are composed of multiple cohorts of personnel at any given time,” and that while “core participants” remain committed to providing group continuity, new member recruitment, personnel turnover, and political opportunities all help “produce change in social movements.” Thus, groups of people may share “some basic assumptions and goals” with others in their movement, thereby binding them together. However, depending on their different perspectives and reasons for joining, new members and events can just as quickly change the movement or break it apart.

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79 Clifford, Shanghai, 1925, 14-15.


Given that workers and students were being shot and arrested, there is sufficient reason to believe that both groups were capable of, and eager to, organize regardless of sponsorship or outside influence of the GMD and CCP. Jeffrey Wasserstrom supports this line of reasoning by highlighting that students used a “repertoire” of similar protest tactics six years earlier during the May 4th Movement of 1919, a full two years prior to the founding of the CCP. Regarding the topic of sponsorship of the May 30th Movement he contends that most CCP members claiming to have guided the students, “often reluctantly admit that underground activists frequently had to follow the lead of other students in order to avoid ‘alienating themselves from the masses’.”  

Notwithstanding these points, a 1924 manifesto from the GMD explained that the Chinese shared a feeling of injustice in that the “armed plundering and economic pressure reduced the country to a semi-colonial status and caused [China] to lose her independence.” Indeed, there were enough shared grievances to compel people to take action even prior to May 30th. 

Thus, on May 30th the students employed the familiar tactic of using lecture teams to inform passers-by about the strike at the Nagai Wata cotton mills, Gu Zhenghong’s murder, the “cruel treatment” of the imprisoned students, and to urge them to “oppose the bye-law governing printed matter.” On the same day, the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce (GCC),

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84 “Appendix IX to Enclosure 1,” in "Despatch no. 470 dated July 6, 1925 from Mr. Palairret at the British Legation in Peking to Mr Austen Chamberlain at the Foreign Office in London," [FO371/10946 (1925): F3917/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 123. Goals of the strike based on content of leaflets and character posters collected that day.
representing 30 Chinese organizations, published an editorial in a local English language newspaper named *The China Press* citing its “unanimous opposition” to these policy changes to the Settlement’s bylaws. The Council’s proposed bylaws sought to increase wharfage dues, increase control of the press, build more roads outside of the settlement, and to establish the mandatory licensing of stock and produce exchanges with the Council.

The GCC did support one resolution regarding the restriction of child labor on the condition that the Council establish free schools for children of the poor. This was a compromise that the Council was unlikely to adopt, given the cost of opening schools. By appearing to compromise, the GCC placed itself in a negotiating position that shifted its own moral responsibility to the children onto the Council. This tactic then allowed them to argue for the humane employment of child labor. While acknowledging that child labor was “harmful to the health of youth,” the GCC explained that without employment “they cannot get food and clothes, and the result [would] be worse than to allow them to work in the factories. …The only practical way, it seems to us, is to allow the child workers to do light and safe work.”

This viewpoint reflects the financial realities for Chinese families and businesses. The average adult male earned the equivalent of $.584 per day, compared to $.352 for females and $.272 for child workers.

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86 Shanghai Bureau of Social Affairs (hereafter SBSA), *Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918* (Shanghai: Bureau of Social Affairs, 1933), 26-31. Wages are in American dollars and come from wage data compiled in 1929. I provide the data to show the difference in wages by demographic. The ever increasing cost of living and inflation diminished the purchasing power of Chinese families and makes the purchasing power of wages difficult to ascertain though it was low. Since this was a government sponsored survey, the goal of providing strike data may have been to encourage foreign investment in Shanghai, and to show that the government had its labor pool under control.
Thus, factories employed women and children wherever they could in a bid to reduce labor costs. One Chinese business named Nanyang Brother Tobacco Company employed 85% women.\(^\text{87}\)

Undoubtedly faced with the potential increased costs of hiring more expensive adult workers, the GCC attempted to avoid a complete abolition of child labor as urged by the local YWCA and an international commission by compromising with the Council.\(^\text{88}\) The GCC also noted that in 1923, the Beijing government promulgated provisional factory laws governing many aspects of labor, including the employment of children, and therefore a new bylaw was unneeded. The GCC asserted that the Council should simply enforce the Chinese law which itself was more restrictive.\(^\text{89}\) This point highlighted the contradiction in the Anglo-American discourse with China regarding the need for Western-style governance as a precondition for the abolition of extraterritoriality. In other words, the Chinese actually had modern laws that the SMC failed to help enforce. Also, Chinese businessmen’s politicization of an issue for their benefit demonstrates a degree of opportunism when considered with their participation in the Movement. One explanation for why the Beijing government adopted factory laws that it could not enforce could be that it was attempting to prove to the international community its own modernity, legitimacy, and that it was responding to a global movement to end child labor. The

\(^{87}\) Sidney L. Greenblatt, ed., “The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company,” Chinese Sociology and Anthropology 6:1 (Fall 1973): 42. This journal provides invaluable translations of worker accounts of the Movement. However, it seems that the CCP influenced the retelling of these stories so I use this source carefully.

\(^{88}\) Chesneaux, The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927, 227-230. The bylaw would have abolished labor of children under ten years of age. Chesneaux explains that many Chinese parents were also against the abolition of child labor as it would affect their household income. Perhaps the GCC’s demand for free school was an altruistic aim rather than a political ploy.

issue of child labor generated multiple bids for control of Shanghai’s labor pool, and
demonstrated that local politics superseded any concerns for the young workers.

Each of the opposed resolutions was of immediate concern to local Chinese businessmen,
and sometimes they presented legal arguments as if representing the Chinese state themselves.
Since they had no positions on the Council and a weak Beijing government, the GCC may have
been attempting to influence the foreign electorate via an English language newspaper.\textsuperscript{90} Thus,
rather than argue the costs and benefits of wharfage dues, the GCC presented an argument
asserting that, while China did not have tariff autonomy because of treaty restrictions, “strictly
speaking, the Council has no power to levy such dues on our fellow citizens. Though we cannot
repeal at present, the diplomatic mistake made by the Shanghai [civil officials in 1898] in
granting the council the power to collect wharfage dues, yet we must be determined to approve
of no further increase in the rate thereof.”\textsuperscript{91}

Infrastructure was also an issue of local control for the Chinese, who saw the expansion
of the settlement via new roads as violations of the SMC’s constitution, and an effort to expand
foreign criminal and civil jurisdiction under the guise of infrastructure improvement. The
Council argued that expansion was broadly supported by the treaty provision of
extraterritoriality.\textsuperscript{92} The issue of roads was multi-faceted, as Chinese businesses benefited from

\textsuperscript{90} Borg, \textit{American Policy and the Chinese Revolution 1925-1928}, 208. There was a Chinese advisory board to the
Council established in 1920 that Borg explains met infrequently, had little influence, no power and dissolved itself
after May 30, 1925 in protest of the incident.

\textsuperscript{91} “30 Chinese Bodies Join in Protests on Bye-Laws,” \textit{The China Press (1925-1938)}, May 30, 1925, ProQuest

\textsuperscript{92} “Waichiaoup’s Reply to Legations,” in \textit{The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette
(1870-1941)}, June 20, 1925, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. (Accessed
November 21, 2015).
their construction. A few Chinese elites even helped the West lobby provincial governments to support construction of the roads. Since there was no national fund for infrastructure, businessmen funded a “Chinese National Road Construction Association” in 1921 to “promote by all lawful means the construction of good roads,” and by spreading “the propaganda of good roads and their ensuing benefits. [The Association] organizes lecturing parties who travel throughout the interior of China, showing pictures of good roads in foreign countries and distributes literature so designed as to simulate interest in this undertaking.”

That the benefits of Western-style roads were not self-evident to some Chinese indicates a degree of resistance possibly for financial reasons, but perhaps they were an unwelcome reminder of foreign intrusion. For members of the GCC who had to deal with civil and criminal conflicts at the borders of the international settlement, foreign roads were a jurisdictional trump card employed by Western courts enforcing their rule of law. What admittedly complicates the GCC’s argument against new road proposals is the fact that a “Pan-Pacific Association and the people of Shanghai” originally helped found this lobbying organization. Therefore, while all Shanghai-based businessmen presumably benefited from a wider distribution network of roads, local tensions with the West inspired Chinese businessmen of the GCC to resist new road construction in vicinity of the International Settlement.

One bylaw proposal that affected all Chinese was the press restriction resolution which required printers and editors to post their address on every single page they printed. The GCC asserted that it was “practically impossible” to enforce, and its $300 fine was seen as “oppressive...”

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to anyone who may by sheer oversight infringe it … the constant danger of violating this bye-law … must not be tolerated.” The GCC further argued that the SMC did not have the authority to propose bylaws in any other matters except pertaining to the “police, defense, road construction, sanitation …[and municipal] taxes.”

Based on the wide scope of this press restriction proposal, it would have affected nearly all sectors of society, as freedom of the press was important to many Chinese. Students producing their own handbills and “big character posters” would have also been affected as they protested using these methods. They certainly could not pay a fine amounting to a year’s salary for producing leaflets of dissent. Nor could they be free from fear of police control and repression. With so much at stake, it is not surprising that Chinese students and business leaders decided to act on May 30th before the June 2nd Ratepayers meeting which sought to vote on these matters. Thus, all Saturday morning while many foreigners were at the semi-annual horse race, student lecture teams passed out pamphlets along Nanking road detailing their grievances.

Although the details vary, Gu Zhenghong’s death seemed to foreshadow the deaths of the eleven student protestors in front of the Louza Police Station on May 30, 1925. Indeed, Inspector Everson, who was in charge of this particular station, would rely on the SMP’s official dispersal tactic of firing directly into the crowd rather than into the air. Historian Nicholas Clifford summarized the incident, explaining that:

94 Ibid.

Shortly after three, there were some fifteen hundred or two thousand people outside Louza, and the police were becoming somewhat alarmed. … By 3:30 p.m., the situation appeared to Everson to be growing increasingly dangerous, and according to some who were there, the crowd began to shout ‘Kill the Foreigners!’ A number of witnesses also claimed later that the crowd tried to charge the station, in which were stored large quantities of arms and ammunition … at 3:37 p.m. Everson shouted a warning in both English and Chinese that the crowd must stop, or he would shoot. Ten seconds later, he ordered his men … to fire. Forty-four shots rang out, and within a few minutes four people were dead, seven more were dying, and some twenty were wounded. Then came silence as the crowd, stunned by what had happened, broke up or fled for shelter.96

Later that day several organizations met to decide what to do next. One meeting was held at the local GMD headquarters and another was held by the Central Committee of the CCP. The Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce was also meeting that day to further discuss their strategy of stopping the Council’s proposed bylaws. Students who had already organized themselves in lecture teams quickly transitioned their efforts to garnering support for their new cause. Having decided to push for a Sanba at their own meeting, they pressured the GCC to sponsor a meeting the following day where all groups could attend.

On May 31st, about 1500 people belonging to the CCP, GMD, various businesses, some workers’ organization, and students from the Shanghai Student Federation converged on the GCC headquarters to draft demands and to organize. Undecided about the need for a Sanba the Federation of Street Unions, which represented lower wage workers, was absent from this meeting. Confronted by the adamant students and the apparent unity of the rest of the Chinese community, they finally acquiesced and agreed to join the triple strike. With all parties unified in a common cause, the students helped spread awareness of the forthcoming demonstrations, strikes and boycotts. Students and Communists tended to be more radical in their aims, drawing on feelings of nationalism and anti-imperialism to oust foreigners from the concessions. Businessmen, who needed convincing, perhaps saw the possibility of derailing the proposed bylaws, and an opportunity for increased profits by encouraging strikes at foreign factories. Workers, who had a history of holding shorter strikes, evidently saw a chance to improve their own labor conditions, and to support the students, who joined them earlier in the month. Financial help was particularly critical, and since it came from an unusually diverse array of sources, the workers were not beholden to any one source of funding. Chinese businessmen and eventually sympathizers across the country supported the workers by donating money to their strike funds.

98 Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 135.
100 “Despatch no. 160 dated 5th October 1925 from the British consul-general in Shanghai to the British Legation in Peking, enclosing the Shanghai Consular District Intelligence Report for the six months ending September 30th,” [FO228/3291], *Shanghai Political & Economic Reports*, 399-400. See also *The China Press*, August 20, 1925.
The Soviet Union also committed funds to workers on strike. This support was a small part of its larger effort of sponsoring the Nationalist party’s United Front of the GMD and CCP. In fact, the Soviet Union’s Communist International directed the CCP’s general strategy of co-opting unions, the GMD, and other organizations in order to grow their own numbers, which were small prior to 1925. Although they had ideological differences, both sides agreed to focus on uniting China against the imperialists and warlords. Since the Soviet Union sponsored the Guangzhou-based GMD, this sponsorship promoted an interregional conflict between Duan Qirui’s (1865-1936) warlord-backed Provisional Government of Beijing in the North and the Communist-backed Nationalist party in the South. Despite the many local issues at play, this national conflict cannot be disentangled from the May Thirtieth Movement. Moreover, the GMD’s Northern Expedition, which united the country in 1928, would rely on similar networks initially called upon during the Movement.\footnote{For more on Beijing-GMD conflict see: Iriye, \textit{After Imperialism}, 61-62.}

Following the agreement to organize, various Chinese leaders agreed with the Communists that they should establish organizations to help facilitate the movement. Thus, they established two agencies known as the GLU and the United Society. The GLU helped distribute strike funds and the United Society focused on educating and directing the Movement. Both fell under the influence of the Communists. The United Society presented its demands to the Beijing government and West’s diplomatic corps. These demands consisted of four preliminary and thirteen formal demands, addressing both local and national issues. The beginning of negotiations was supposed to be contingent upon the cancellation of the state of emergency, the

demobilization of the Volunteer Corps and other forces, the release of those arrested, and the opening of occupied schools. Neither the Diplomatic Body nor the SMC ever honored these preconditions. The list of formal demands specifically sought suspension and trials for the policemen, redress for the families of the slain, a formal apology, replacement of some members on the Council, freedom of speech, better treatment of workers and the right to unionize, appointment of Chinese Commissioner of Police, cancellation of proposed bylaws, no further extension of foreign roads outside the settlement, control of the Mixed Court returned to the Chinese, Chinese eligibility to sit on the Council, abolition of extraterritoriality, and withdrawal of British and Japanese gunboats.¹⁰²

Importantly, at least two lists were presented by leaders of the GCC and the United Society, though they were similar enough that the Western diplomats made no mention of this. The demands tellingly left out by the businessmen related to trade union rights, the return of control of the Mixed Court, the abolition of extraterritoriality, and the evacuation of foreign gunboats.¹⁰³ This break in unity between the GCC and the GLU/United Society reflected the interests of those involved. The latter interested in a long term Sanba against all imperial powers. The former, more moderate organization, apparently was more interested in a short term Sanba

¹⁰² Clifford, Shanghai, 1925, 26-31.

targeting the British. After all, it was the Chinese businessmen bankrolling workers’ strike pay and experiencing loss of profits due to the shop closures.\textsuperscript{104}

Thus, the demands present a valuable source of analysis, an explanation of why each group was willing to participate, and why their stated goals apparently differed. Since the opposition to the Council’s bylaw proposals contributed to the protest on May 30th, and because the thirteen formal demands reflect this same opposition, one could argue that in addition to feelings of nationalism, local issues played a large role in persuading the businessmen of the GCC to join the Movement.

The height of the May Thirtieth Movement was arguably in June when the total number of participants peaked to between 100,000-150,000 people in Shanghai alone, with thousands of others taking part in over thirty-eight towns along the coast and interior.\textsuperscript{105} Participation numbers do not capture the complexity and diversity of the Movement because each city had its own dynamics and some historians have argued that rather than all strikes being solidarity movements demonstrating unity such as the 300,000 workers striking in Beijing in mid-June, some cities like Guangzhou had sympathy strikes that split into seemingly separate movements. For example, British forces killed about fifty Chinese workers, holding a demonstration on Shamian Island in Guangzhou on June 23, 1925. This violence—known as the Shakee massacre—spurred a sixteen-month boycott and strike against Britain and Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{106} These sympathy strikes

\textsuperscript{104} Rigby, \textit{The May 30 Movement}, 52 and 97. The GCC estimated their alleged losses at $10,000,000. This could have been a ploy to get more money from the treaty powers. See also Clifford, \textit{Shanghai, 1925}, 36 and Borg, \textit{American Policy and the Chinese Revolution 1925-1928}, 30. Borg’s view is that they thought some demands were too extreme.


\textsuperscript{106} Rigby, \textit{The May 30 Movement}, 65.
reflected the shared grievances held by many Chinese. These included the abuse of extraterritoriality, and the shock of hearing that people had been gunned down in the street by foreigners. However, because the movements in each city began and ended at different times one could argue that while participants received inspiration and some direction from Shanghai, they were driven to long term action for their own reasons. If one interprets the Movement from a geopolitical perspective, however, one can view the length of Hong Kong’s and Shanghai’s unrest as a reflection of the influence exerted on the workers by the GMD in the south and the Beijing government and the Japanese in the North. Chapter 3 will discuss these geopolitical factors, their impact on our interpretation of Chinese nationalism, and how they influenced the effectiveness of the boycotts against Britain and Japan.

While the Sanba technically ended in Shanghai with the opening of small shops on June 26, 1925, the workers’ strike movement persisted into late Fall with the help of opportunistic Chinese businessmen who provided strike pay for their competitors’ workers. In the past workers on strike had little access to strike funds, and their strikes were consequently shorter in length. Workers were rarely able to sustain such a strike past ten days. Chinese foremen known as “Number Ones” usually handled workplace-related disputes informally since unions were illegal until 1927 when the Nationalists united the country and instituted major reforms. In addition to their labor demands, workers would often demand strike compensation from their

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107 Clifford, Shanghai, 1925, 35.

108 SBSA, Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918, 30. Strikes lasted between two and ten days usually.

109 “Despatch no. 160 dated 5th October 1925 from the British consul-general in Shanghai to the British Legation in Beijing, enclosing the Shanghai Consular District Intelligence Report for the six months ending September 30th,” [FO228/3291], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 400.
employers before they resumed work. The power of a strike depended on how united they were as workplace divisions, and lack of job security affected their willingness to participate. Even in the absence of effective state regulatory protections, worker solidarity could increase their negotiating power. The May Thirtieth Movement was special in that workers united with students, Communists, and business leaders to achieve some of their own goals in addition to the national ones. This unity was not freely given. Adult workers had to provide for their families, and factory owners were unlikely to compensate them for striking for political reasons. Thus, the strike pay from the GLU, an affiliated organization of the GCC, was crucial. Significantly, historian Martin Frazier notes that the communist members of the GLU lamented that workers perceived their role not as their leaders, but as distributors of the donated funds. This point emphasizes the centrality of money in the workers’ rationale for participating, further challenging the ideas that any one group “led” them, or that anti-imperialism brought them to the streets.

Self-interested behavior prevailed in the domestic business community, which discerned an opportunity to increase profits. The most notable example of business opportunism uniting participants of the Movement was the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company (NBTC), which contributed $50,000 monthly or roughly 10% of the total strike funds to hurt its largest competitor, the British American Tobacco Company. They hoped to capitalize on the boycott by supporting a strike at BAT factories, stealing Bonsack machine operators and mechanics, and


by selling more Chinese brand cigarettes.\textsuperscript{112} NBTC’s comprehensive attack on BAT contributed to a multi-factory 15,000 person strike. This strike was historical because of its size, and because it was the longest of all strikes in Shanghai, lasting over four months from early-June to mid-October.\textsuperscript{113} In another example of business opportunism, \textit{The China Press} reported that “China Merchants San Peh and Ningpo-Shaishing Steam Navigation companies each give $50,000 monthly to support striking seamen,” and that “$200,000 is needed monthly to continue strikes.”\textsuperscript{114} Without this type of mutual support, the unity of workers and business leaders would not have lasted as long as it did.

Nationalism only partially explains the motivations of participants of the May Thirtieth Movement. What brought many of them together were very personal, local factors. While it is true that the nascent Chinese Communist Party, the GMD, and university students used the Movement as an opportunity to expand their influence nationally, and to end “foreign privilege,” merchants promoted and bankrolled the Movement in an effort to shift profits away from foreign businesses.\textsuperscript{115} Moreover, Shanghai businessmen needed to derail any ratepayer’s vote that would increase their taxes, prevent them from employing cheap child labor, or extend foreign roads further into their business territory. There was enough at stake, and sufficient opportunity present, for them to financially support workers’ goals. Workers would not have missed the irony

\textsuperscript{112} Greenblatt, ed., “The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company,” 82.


\textsuperscript{115} Clifford, \textit{Shanghai}, 1925, 16. The fact that an international judicial inquiry took place demonstrates that foreign powers saw the need for an outside look into the incident.
that Chinese business leaders, who repressed their organization and dissent, as much as any foreigners had, now supported them. Besides the financial incentives in cooperating with these other groups, workers desired better labor conditions, and were outraged by yet another case of police violence. The next chapter will focus on these motivations by weighing evidence of nationalism against other factors such as workplace conditions, obstacles to organization, low wages, and strike pay.
Chapter 2

Their Own Cause: Worker Cooperation in the May Thirtieth Movement

The May Thirtieth Movement played a “pivotal role in the development of the Chinese labor movement.”\(^{116}\) However, it would be inaccurate to characterize its rapid growth as evidence of an awakening of class consciousness. In truth, the boundary lines among participants were not clearly defined by class or income, as much as they were united by the opportunity to gain something from the crisis. As discussed in the introduction, the Movement’s proximate causes were the killing of a worker named Gu Zhenghong in a Japanese textile mill in mid-May, and the subsequent shooting deaths of eleven protesters by the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) on May 30, 1925. In retrospect, police brutality served as a spark to a national movement, with Chinese media quickly condemning the deaths, and mostly local English-language media reflexively defending the police. This represented an unsurprising division of opinion that at first glance points to “foreign privilege” under siege.\(^{117}\) There is little doubt that Shanghai had its violent episodes, but worker participation in the Movement resulted less from its eponymous incident, and more from practical reasons such as the generally poor working conditions across most factories, the need for better wages, and because the large amount of strike pay helped mobilize workers.

Infuriated by the death of Gu Zhenghong at the hands of a Japanese foreman two weeks earlier at a cotton mill, Gu’s fellow workers asked the Shanghai Student Union for help in negotiating a settlement for his family, and in gaining the release of imprisoned workers. The

\(^{116}\) Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850-2010*, 74-75.

\(^{117}\) Clifford, *Shanghai, 1925*, 16. The fact that an international judicial inquiry took place demonstrates that foreign powers saw the need for an outside look into the incident.
students collected money, and passed out flyers which helped generate broader support in the city. While students may have been lead planners in the protests at the Louza police station on Saturday, May 30, 1925, the workers actively participated in it, perhaps believing something positive would come of it. Students from eight universities formed small groups and began giving anti-Japanese lectures on street corners. By mid-day, workers, students, and passers-by began protesting at the police station in an effort to gain the release of workers and students who had been arrested. By 3:30 p.m., the crowd began chanting “Kill the Foreigners!” and some students attempted to break into the police station, but the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) held them off. The constable in charge of the mixed Sikh and Chinese police detachment, Inspector Everson, began shouting in both English and Mandarin, ordering everyone to disperse. With the crowd growing larger and pressing inward towards the police, those that wanted to disperse could not do so. After a final inaudible warning, Inspector Everson ordered his men to shoot, wounding 20 and killing four, with seven more dying later. The crowd, “stunned by what had happened, broke up or fled for shelter. Police patrols moved out of the station into the streets” seeking to restore order.

Seemingly a local incident that had spun out of control, the deaths of students and workers on May 30, 1925 generated national outrage and angry protests in many other cities including Guangzhou, Beijing, and Hankou. The following day, Shanghai’s GCC had a 1500-person meeting with students, workers, Communists, and local elites to determine what

\[\text{118 Clifford, } Shanghai, 1925, 14-16.\]
\[\text{119 Ibid., 16.}\]
\[\text{120 Bergère, “The Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911-37,” 797.}\]
happened and what course of action to take. The group ultimately decided to hold a Sanba.\footnote{Chesneaux, \textit{The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927}, 264.} Additionally, they formed a new organization called the Shanghai General Labor Union (GLU) to “take control of the strike,” and which coincidently had “direct links with the Communist Party.”\footnote{Ibid.} Finally, the Chamber presented “Thirteen Demands” to the Beijing government and representatives of the Diplomatic Body which sought improved working conditions, wages, redress for the families of the slain, and a variety of other articles meant to reduce foreign control of China’s domestic concerns and economic dealings.\footnote{Bergère, “The Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911-37,” 797. The GCC would later add three more demands bringing the total number of demands to seventeen.}

Many factors contributed to the national scale of the Sanba including support from the Chinese Communist Party, news coverage generating outrage and sympathy strikes, word of mouth, international judicial proceedings that seemed to be a referendum on the international system of privileges, and even Chinese businesses hoping to steal away customers from foreign firms by promoting local boycotts.\footnote{Cochran, \textit{Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry}, 178.} However, despite a strong, nationwide showing in the summer, including significant economic losses to foreign companies like British-American Tobacco, most of the political demands “would remain unfulfilled.”\footnote{Smith, \textit{Like Cattle and Horses}, 185.} Interestingly, unlike the May 4th Movement of 1919, workers, not students, made up the bulk of the Movement. The extended duration of the Triple Stoppage and palpable fears in many foreigners generated a discourse about the future viability of extraterritoriality in China. Furthermore, various

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\item\footnote{Chesneaux, \textit{The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927}, 264.}
\item\footnote{Ibid.}
\item\footnote{Bergère, “The Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911-37,” 797. The GCC would later add three more demands bringing the total number of demands to seventeen.}
\item\footnote{Cochran, \textit{Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry}, 178.}
\item\footnote{Smith, \textit{Like Cattle and Horses}, 185.}
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organizations gained invaluable experience, grew in size, and developed relationships they would use again in support of the Nationalist Army’s Northern Expedition beginning the following year.\textsuperscript{126} In the absence of a singular, coherent truth, assessing the origins of such a movement involves determining what factors most led workers to their collective action.

Violence and conflict were common enough in China. With foreign gunboats, railway guards, military forces, foreign militias, local gangs, and regional armies affecting the day-to-day lives of those working in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{127} In cases involving Westerners, the British-led Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) were the ones breaking up strikes in order to protect factory property and limit “breaches of peace [and] tranquility.”\textsuperscript{128} For example, the SMP quickly moved to stop a wave of strikes at British owned tobacco factories in 1922 by arresting four female leaders for “disturbing the peace,” who Shanghai’s Mixed Court then fined them the equivalent of a week’s pay.\textsuperscript{129} While an arrest may not seem like an overt act of violence, the degree of coercion felt by the women on strike for living wages coupled by the reach of Mixed Courts must have antagonized already strained relations between factory owners and the Chinese.\textsuperscript{130} Moreover, the

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\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 185-189.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Feuerwerker, “The Foreign Presence in China,” 152-153.
\item \textsuperscript{130} The factory owners may not have been able to immediately call upon police forces during labor unrest, but the system of laws protects owners’ property and favors their “tranquility” over workers’ livelihood. Cochran makes a similar point that BAT was not always able to successfully call upon the state for favors or intervention. Often, BAT negotiated its taxes with the Beijing government itself. See Cochran, Big Business in China, 205.
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hefty fines may have served as a substantial deterrent to extended strikes since unions and strike pay were rare at this time, except when provided by the factory owners as a means of redress.\textsuperscript{131} Since both Chinese and foreign forces participated in policing up discontent workers at various times, it is likely that the workers felt just as much frustration with the entire labor system than they did with any group of factory owners, irrespective of nationality.\textsuperscript{132}

In speaking of the general sentiments of his fellow countrymen, Fu Hongjun, a Chinese executive working for the Cotton Goods Exchange at Shanghai, felt that the most pressing “civil strife” was the fault of “out-of-office” militarists, foreign funding of said militarists, endless import of foreign arms, and simple banditry that lay beyond the control of international forces. He further argued that the Chinese do their best to protect the lives and property of foreigners, and that there was “in reality no anti-foreign sentiment among the people of China.”\textsuperscript{133} His solution for peace was international recognition of China’s sovereignty by ending extraterritoriality, and through the employment of former soldiers in factories. While Fu’s point of view contradicts the anti-foreign appearance of the May Thirtieth Movement, his editorial, which won an award from the newspaper for “Most Practical Peace Plan for China,” demonstrates that we should consider viewing the workers’ political strikes as a practical means of improving their

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  \item \textsuperscript{131} Unions were illegal under Article 22 of the Public Order Act as cited in Smith, \textit{Like Cattle and Horses}, 142 and n. 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} As far as strike data goes, Chinese owned factories experienced a slight majority of all strikes; a point discussed later in the paper.
\end{itemize}
lives, rather than just forming a nationalistic agenda of ousting foreigners from China.\textsuperscript{134} S.A. Smith convincingly argues that nationalism and anti-imperialism were not firm ideas, but more abstract concepts with many Chinese employing anti-foreign, nationalistic, and class-based rhetoric interchangeably because there were “conflicting diagnoses of the nation’s plight in terms of warlordism or imperialism.”\textsuperscript{135} Regardless of whether or not they agreed with these abstract concepts, the workers cooperated and participated in the Movement most likely because of how they felt about their own situation, and because they had reason to believe that they could improve their conditions.

Perhaps better representing overall perceptions or feelings about the May Thirtieth incident are two political posters seemingly meant to generate support for the Movement.\textsuperscript{136} The first political poster designed by the Beijing United Medical Students Association in Support of the Shanghai Incident (Beijing xiehe yixue xuesheng hu'an houyuanhui) depicts a foreign constable looming over two dead Chinese protestors with the words “A Direct Violation of the Principle of Humanity” suspended above their bodies (Illustration 1). A second poster made by the same group depicts a British-made rifle with bold red letters stating the alleged police officer’s order of “SHOOT TO KILL” (Illustration 2).\textsuperscript{137} Whether the posters were factual or not,

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\item \textsuperscript{134} M.C. Powell, “Mr. Fu Hung-chun” in \textit{Who’s Who in China: Containing the Pictures and Biographies of China’s Best Known Political, Financial, Business, and Professional Men}, 3rd ed. (Shanghai: China Weekly Review, 1925), 600.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Smith, \textit{Like Cattle and Horses}, 194.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Wasserstrom, \textit{Global Shanghai}, 64.
\end{itemize}
the intent of the posters to incite anger towards foreigners using concepts well understood by workers is clear enough.

Illustration 1. A Direct Violation of the Principle of Humanity poster. 
Illustration 2. Shoot to Kill poster.

Outside of the May Thirtieth Movement’s anti-foreign propaganda, Westerners living in Shanghai also had varying perspectives of the recent increase in strikes and the Movement itself. However, it seems that many felt an increase in negative sentiments and feared another Boxer-style Rebellion. For example, one New York Times correspondent and former Shanghai resident, Harry A. Franck, reported two weeks after the incident that older residents lamented the general “decrease in the old Chinese courtesies … a shrinking in the politeness with which they are treated,” but they “disagreed widely” as to the seriousness of the [May Thirtieth] incident,
whereas younger “American men in town [as part of the American Volunteer Corps] were in khaki and had rifle handy beside their desks or counters. [They had even thrown] barbed-wire entanglements worthy of the Western front … across every street.” Thus, available evidence indicates that foreigners perceived a change in treatment and many felt threatened by the May Thirtieth Movement’s rhetoric, and feared the economic problems potentially resulting from unrest. The degree of fear and size of the strike was large enough to warrant the quick deployment of Chinese and foreign forces to safeguard people and property against any threats posed by the workers and their Sanba.

Despite the rhetoric, nationalism and anti-imperialism make less convincing arguments when compared with the rumors of unjustified shootings, and the workers’ daily experience with violence and coercion. Workers knew how they felt about their treatment in the city and in its factories. In addition to considering how foreigners policed labor unrest, it is appropriate to compare workplace conditions in Chinese and foreign owned factories. Such an exercise will help isolate the more immediate and practical reasons for participating in the Movement beyond arguments of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and class consciousness.

Cigarette production provides an interesting case study of Shanghai industrial working conditions because it allows for domestic and foreign comparisons that do not necessarily carry

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140 Smith, Like Cattle and Horses, 6-7.
the negative associations that “new” products might. In fact, there was a long established “interregional market for tobacco … in China” in the form of snuff and for use with water pipes.\textsuperscript{141} Moreover, “tobacco use was already pervasive throughout China when … machine-rolled cigarettes first began to take hold” in the late 1800s.\textsuperscript{142} This change in tobacco use, however, was not unique to China as many consumers in the West also transitioned from hand-rolled to machine-rolled cigarettes.\textsuperscript{143} This global shift in consumption and production patterns partially owes it origins to a British inventor named James A. Bonsack who created a large machine that could roll 200 cigarettes a minute in 1881 (Illustration 3).\textsuperscript{144} Bonsack sold the rights to use his machine to two companies: American Tobacco Company and Imperial Tobacco Company of England, which eventually combined to form British-American Tobacco Company (BAT) in 1902.\textsuperscript{145}

The Bonsack machine is important to the story of labor conditions in Shanghai because of its impact on production. Prior to the mechanization of cigarette rolling, hand rolling cigarettes was labor intensive and consequently akin to local handicraft production. Bonsack’s machine did not entirely eliminate the market for cheaper hand rolled cigarettes in China, but it did shape the labor conditions for many workers in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{146} Namely, factories that used the machines


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 131.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{145} Benedict, \textit{Golden-Silk Smoke}, 136.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 148.
went from employing many similarly skilled workers to having a stratified labor force that needed mechanics, operators, and a substantial increase in packers that would have absorbed some of the displaced hand rollers. These workplace divisions had a noticeable impact on worker unity and normally weakened worker bargaining power labor disputes since factory owners could play groups against each other. Wage levels and job security also depended on how easily management could replace workers.147

The introduction of new technology to an industry such as the Bonsack machine is not a new story, but its effects on the industrial design of the workplace are important to note. For example, the preparation of tobacco leaves takes a dry environment, and so windows and doors may need to remain closed to prevent changes in humidity. The resulting compartmentalization of factories was not necessarily a deliberate effort to keep the workers divided and unable to

147 Perry, Shanghai on Strike, 131-132. This might explain why low paid workers were also the most hesitant to go on strike.
organize. Many business decisions arguably result from pragmatic solutions for incorporating new technology, rather than deliberate efforts to make workers less able to organize. 

Notwithstanding this caveat, real divisions in the workplace existed beyond skill level.

By 1925, cigarette business organization, worker treatment, native place (hometown) ties, and regulations were relatively consistent in foreign and domestically-owned factories, although variations existed. While working conditions in other industries such as textile, transportation, and printing were equally deplorable, the tobacco industry receives my attention because of its global nature, the high frequency and extended duration of strikes, availability of evidence across foreign and Chinese owned factories, BAT’s emergence as a near-monopoly, and because compared to other commodities tobacco historians have generated a sufficient amount of research on which to base my own analysis.

Foreign-owned BAT had a veritable monopoly with a market share of 77% of national cigarette sales in China. Its closest competitor was the Chinese-owned Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company (NBTC), which along with scores of other Chinese firms made up ~22.9% of national sales. Both companies took different marketing and distribution approaches in selling their products. NBTC focused on providing a cheaper national product (guohuo) to all Chinese consumers through a native place merchant network originating out of Guangdong province. BAT had enough capital to market several brands to sell to different customer income levels.


149 Cochran, Big Business in China, 229-230. Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company was the second largest company, but still had only a small share of the market and struggled to remain profitable.

150 Ibid., 67 and 88.

151 Cox, The Global Cigarette, 152-160.
BAT’s two marketing approaches consisted of using “autonomous Chinese commission agents,” and selling cigarettes “directly through its salaried managers and staff members.” It also focused on consistent quality, even distributing American “bright tobacco seed” for local production. These supply chain and marketing differences had significant effects for the long term profitability of both companies, with BAT leading the industry. However, the May Thirtieth Movement’s boycott of foreign companies (especially BAT) allowed NBTC to sell its domestic cigarettes for substantial profits.

Depending on your place in Shanghai society BAT was known as either the “Insincere Mountain” (Kongsan) by Chinese businessmen involved in tobacco or the “golden rice bowl” (Jinfanwan) by factory workers. Workers considered BAT the golden rice bowl because of the “high wages and good treatment afforded its workers, especially compared with other industrial laborers in the city.” During the aforementioned strike at a BAT factory on Yalu Road in 1922, one reporter characterized female workers as being “malicious” despite “getting better wages … than at any local Chinese factories.” The reporter mentions that the women complained about having to “work harder than the women [at the] Pootung [factory].”


153 Ibid., 67.


156 Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 141.


158 Ibid.
reflecting this reputation of maltreatment and lower wages, Chinese factories endured 64% of all strikes as compared with foreign factories, except during the May Thirtieth Movement when BAT workers stayed on the picket lines longer than any other group.\textsuperscript{159} Regardless of reputation, treatment in factories was generally poor according to most contemporary accounts. Also, it is clear that some newspapers cast the workers as irrational or ungrateful, and that despite the many obstacles, workers were aware of labor conditions beyond the walls of their own factories.\textsuperscript{160} This indicates a degree of cooperation and strategy among members of the Movement, in order to achieve better economic conditions. Since there were at least forty-seven labor organizations such as the YMCA, the Society for Industrial Advance, and the CCP’s Labor Secretariat that attempted to influence workers as early as 1922, it is perhaps futile to determine where workers’ own sense of Shanghai labor conditions ends and where outside influence begins.\textsuperscript{161}

The work day in a BAT cigarette factory normally lasted twelve hours, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.\textsuperscript{162} However, NBTC work days were usually ten hours long and more inconsistent, sometimes surging past eighteen hours daily in order to finish a shipment before provincial tax increases took effect.\textsuperscript{163} Both companies paid specialized workers a daily rate, while easily replaceable or, perhaps, easily tracked workers such as cigarette packers, received piece-rate

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\textsuperscript{159} SBSA, \textit{Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918}, 40 and 88.

\textsuperscript{160} S.A. Smith argues in \textit{Like Cattle and Horses} that the 1922 Pudong strikes demonstrate the first case of cross-industry cooperation between Nikko textile workers and BAT tobacco workers. He stresses that although communists were involved the workers themselves led the cooperation.

\textsuperscript{161} Chesneaux, \textit{The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927}, 178, 199, and n. 202 on 487. He makes the case that most of the credit belongs to the CCP.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 72.

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compensation.\textsuperscript{164} Workers who brought food from home would often find their meals had soured due to the working conditions and long hours between breaks. In an effort to keep the production line moving and to aid in enforcing regulations, companies employed roaming guards to enforce bans on talking and to ensure doors were locked to prevent unauthorized movement.\textsuperscript{165} The NBTC guards even carried axes, though this practice eventually ended.\textsuperscript{166} Despite the axes and locked doors, most workers considered their foremen or “Number Ones” to be the greatest factor in their working conditions.\textsuperscript{167}

Since foreign supervisors rarely entered workshop areas, the Number Ones were responsible for the hiring, firing, compensation, discipline, and productivity of their workers.\textsuperscript{168} In most factories in Shanghai the Number Ones were from the same native place or hometown as their workers, and so they meted out jobs for a recruitment fee, expensive dinner, or, at a minimum, required an introduction from a family member or employment agency. Jobs were then passed down from one generation to the next in what was known as the dingti replacement system.\textsuperscript{169} The Number One was often a gang member enforcing “fictive kinship and secret

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\hspace{1cm}164 Chesneaux, \textit{The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927}, 88.
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\hspace{1cm}165 Greenblatt, ed. "The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company," 80-81.
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\hspace{1cm}166 Ibid., 75.
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\hspace{1cm}167 SBSA, \textit{Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918}, 27-35. Martin Frazier makes the argument that it took cooperation with their foremen in order to go on strike due to the degree of control they had over workers. It's hard to determine whether workers' achieved enough momentum to break free of this control or if foremen sensing change in the air became allies instead of enemies.
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\hspace{1cm}168 Perry, \textit{Shanghai on Strike}, 139. In the case of NBTC: Cantonese supervisors.
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\hspace{1cm}169 Ibid., 140-142.
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society discipline” on his or her workers by making them use terms like uncle, aunty, or disciple in presiding over this labor-contract system, known as baogongtou. ”

The Number One also determined paychecks minus penalties for disobedience, poor quality work, and talking back. If the Number One’s family owned a restaurant, he or she might require workers to buy lunch from them. Not unlike a company-town found in America, Number Ones controlled every aspect of work life, all under threat of dismissal or more often, corporal punishment. Despite being a “golden rice bowl,” the overall effect of employing Number Ones at BAT or other factories, was that workers had many obstacles to worker cohesion in addition to those inherent to the industry.

The cigarette factories tended to have four departments directly related to production: leaf (yanyu bu), rolling (juanyan bu), packing (baozhuang bu), and the machine shop. Each department had its own section of the factory sometimes with separate gates. The leaf department consisted almost entirely of women except for a few males to operate machinery. Most of the BAT workers came from Subei or Pudong. The NBTC workers hailed from Ningbo, Jiangsu, or Anhwei provinces. In BAT factories, the Number Ones tended to come from the same native place or hometown, but NBTC employed forewomen from Guangzhou in its leaf department seemingly in an effort to increase efficiency and to maintain a loyal management

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172 Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 136-137.

173 Ibid., 138.

174 Ibid., 139.
based on native place ties. In this department the conditions were hot and dusty since the windows remained closed in an effort to protect the tobacco leaves. These decisions contributed to workers getting chronic respiratory infections and nicotine headaches. Talking was not allowed, and most considered this the worst department to be in. The workers had to weigh, treat, steam, de-stem, and mix the leaves. The men then used machines to grind and cut the leaves before women would add spices and perfume to the tobacco shreds prior to curing.

Management employed casual labor and paid workers on average ten yuan a month based on the weight of leaves prepared, which could not cover even half of a typical family’s monthly expenses.

The rolling department consisted largely of males employed as operators and apprentices of the Bonsack machines. BAT required ten years of experience prior to promoting an apprentice to operator and paid these workers from Subei or Pudong a daily rate amounting to twenty yuan a month. BAT Management paid these workers directly for their loyalty and because they were essential to the entire operation. NBTC employed males aged 16-30 in the rolling department,


176 Ibid., 41.

177 Perry, Shanghai on Strike, 140-141. While Perry uses terms like “unskilled” to describe this casual labor it is more accurate to state that the skills used by some workers were more easily replaced due to the amount of training their particular positions employed. One’s starting position in a company did not necessarily reflect a worker’s skills or potential, rather than a start point in the industry. The baogongtou contract hiring process, discussed earlier, heavily emphasized native place associations (hometown affiliations) for job placement.

178 Ibid., 140.

and it seems that their apprenticeship was less lengthy.\textsuperscript{179} NBTC rollers made about 30\% more than a female worker in the leaf department.\textsuperscript{180}

The packing department was usually the largest department, accounting for about 70\% of all employees, most of whom were female.\textsuperscript{181} The packers wrapped the cigarettes in foil, put them in cartons, and then in boxes. The BAT workers in this department were mostly from Shaoxing. Historian Elizabeth Perry contends that due to their native place origins in southern China they were paid more than their coworkers in similarly skilled positions, averaging thirteen yuan a month. Evidence is unclear of how native places differed from other workshops at NBTC factories except that they sometimes employed Number Ones from Guangzhou, though age and gender seem to correspond with how physically demanding the job was.\textsuperscript{182} NBTC workers were usually paid less than those at BAT.

The machine shop was entirely male and consisted of copper smiths who repaired machines and sharpened blades, pipe fitters who maintained the boiler rooms, iron-smiths, woodworkers, and cement masons. Most not trained in the department came from southern China where industrialization first took hold. BAT paid these employees an average of thirty

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{181} Perry, \textit{Shanghai on Strike}, 141.
\textsuperscript{182} Greenblatt, ed. “The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company,” 45.
\textsuperscript{183} Perry, \textit{Shanghai on Strike}, 141.
yuan a month.\textsuperscript{183} Thus, in 1928, NBTC was paying its machine shop three times the daily rate of a laborer working in the leaf department.\textsuperscript{184}

Besides the physical compartmentalization of work at tobacco factories and the pressures from Number Ones, labor organization was slow to develop due to native place divisions. A high paid mechanic from southern China had little in common with a low paid leaf shop worker from Subei. Their actual conditions of employment were markedly different, though one could argue that they might share an equal amount of anger towards foreigners. Historian Elizabeth Perry argues that despite the native place cliques and income divisions, “local cultures overlapped with work experiences to create a powerful potential for labor activism.”\textsuperscript{185} This point is borne out by the nationwide events following the May Thirtieth incident.

What can be seen from the labor conditions that Chinese workers endured is that regardless of the owner of one’s factory, wages were generally low, your Number One exercised an excessive amount of control in your life, you generally worked with people from your same province, and there were limited means of redress outside of direct mediation or bargaining with foremen. Only when wages or conditions became intolerable did workers and their foremen cooperate long enough to achieve incremental changes without disrupting the system. As Martin Frazier argues, foremen and workers had to cooperate in “inter-group coalitions” in order to

\textsuperscript{184} Greenblatt, ed. “The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company,” 60.

\textsuperscript{185} Perry, \textit{Shanghai on Strike}, 142.
achieve results.\textsuperscript{186} Thus, this informal mediation process and compartmentalization of workers favored factory owners and made gains difficult to achieve without a greater degree of organization, which the students, Communists, and General Chamber of Commerce arguably provided.

Following the establishment of the Republic in 1912, trade guilds and direct mediation with foremen dictated labor conditions, as they had prior to the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Thus, “the mediation of labor conflicts was either a private affair to be taken care of by the parties concerned, … or should the conflicts grow to such an importance as to menace the peace and order of the community at large, it would then come under the sphere of police authorities.”\textsuperscript{187} There simply were few national laws protecting factory workers or even governing commerce.\textsuperscript{188} A seeming exception to this fact was the provisional “Factory Law” issued in 1923. The law reflected growing international concerns over pervasive child labor, little time off, unjustified deductions from wages, the need for death gratuities resulting from loss of life at the work place, and the need for paid maternity leave. However, as historian Jean Chesneaux notes, the government failed to address the largest concern of workers, which was the labor contract system (\textit{baogong tou}). There were even further plans “to introduce trade union legislation that would make unions legal on the condition that their activities be confined to social matters, mutual aid,

\textsuperscript{186} Frazier, "Mobilizing a Movement: Cotton Mill Foremen in the Shanghai Strikes of 1925," 24. His broader point is that the Movement was less of a nationalistic one, and more of a result of “inter-group coalitions” as evidenced by the variations in "targets of the general strike." Number Ones most likely felt the thrust of the workers and decided to join along rather than be seen as part of the problem.

\textsuperscript{187} SBSA, \textit{Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918}, 37.

\textsuperscript{188} See generally David Faure's \textit{China and Capitalism: A History of Business Enterprise in Modern China} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).
and the improvement of standard of living...Should a union take part in anti-government activities, disturb public order, or act against the ‘interests of the nation,’ it would automatically be dissolved.” Given the weak nature of China’s Beijing-based national government, the Factory Law promulgated by its labor ministry (Nong Shang Bu) basically went unenforced in Shanghai and other industrial centers.189

At the municipal level, seemingly beyond the reach of national government, Shanghai’s middlemen, merchant organizations, and social networks formed “the glue that held Shanghai together” on a day-to-day basis.190 Despite the inherent cooperation involved in running a city with multiple governments and nationalities, the Shanghai Municipal Police and its Mixed Court did have a “Provisional Chinese Code.” The code allowed the police to make an arrest whenever strikes occurred or disturbed the peace, as a Detective named Sergeant Tinkler did when arresting four women he suspected of being the leaders of the aforementioned November 18, 1922 strike at a BAT factory.191 Thus, workers were allowed to address their grievances with their repressive Number Ones or go on strike, risking arrest and fines should things get out of hand.

Workers’ complaints fit broadly into either economic or political categories according to one journalist named George E. Sokolsky, who wrote about the May Thirtieth Movement for The North China Herald, a weekly newspaper reflecting the views of its American and British readers. The division seemed to imply a code for legitimate versus illegitimate reasons for

189 Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement 1919-1927*, 227-228. Shanghai’s ability to operate independently of the national government has generated dozens of books detailing how society held itself together in the early Republican period.

190 Dillon and Oi ed., *At the Crossroads of Empires*, 6.

striking by noting that “students, … merchants [and] Chinese Bolsheviks” led certain phases of the strikes that were anti-British or anti-Japanese in tone. When describing economic phases of the May Thirtieth Movement, he stated that “to the Chinese labourer, good working conditions are apparently not as important as wage increase[s].” Not surprisingly, Sokolsky praised the working conditions at BAT, citing education programs, inflation-pegged rice stipends, and “health protection,” while assuring the readership he was not “repeating company propaganda.”

The economic reasons for labor activism are fairly clear, intuitive, and even widely understood by factory owners to be legitimate, though perhaps excessive at times. In analyzing the city’s economic strike data, the Shanghai Bureau of Social Affairs followed the recommendations of the International Labor Office (ILO) in sorting the available data into either political or economic categories, as Sokolsky had. The economic category better known as “disputes related to collective bargaining” concerned workers’ rights to form trade unions, matters of collective agreement, matters of wages, matters of hours worked, engagement or dismissal of workers, worker treatment, regulations, and a miscellany category encompassing anything from misunderstandings to demands for holidays. Almost echoing Sokolsky’s sentiments, the Bureau found that the majority of strikes “came about in establishments of Chinese management.”


193 Ibid.

194 SBSA, Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918, 32-33.

195 Ibid., 40.
Although the ILO categorized disputes in this way, it might be said that its intent was in gauging worker-management relations and business climate. Comparatively, foreigners accepted the legitimacy of strikes over working conditions but saw “agitation” as cause for state intervention. Intuitively, one could argue that workers themselves saw both economic and political rhetoric as a means to an end for achieving better results.

What seems clear is that foreigners perceived that strikes unified by anti-imperialism as unjust, and that they genuinely believed that foreign-owned factories took great pains to improve working conditions. Foreigners simply did not see themselves as oppressive overlords. Rather, they self-servingly saw themselves as “Shanghailanders” with just as much right to live and work there as the Chinese. Historian Elizabeth Perry asserts that workers thought that they could get more money from BAT because of its success, and thus were more strike prone. S.A. Smith contends that the anti-imperialism rhetoric points to nationalism as the real explanation for the strikes, not because of opportunistic demands for a greater share of the profit, as Perry argues. One point that supports the idea of a budding nationalism is that there were “scarcely two or three” recorded strikes in German and Italian-owned establishments from 1918-1932. One could argue that following the Treaty of Versailles, in which Germany relinquished its Shandong...

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197 Ibid.

concession to Japan, these countries left less of an imperial footprint on Shanghai than did Great Britain, France, Japan, or the United States.¹⁹⁹

Workers did not always know why they were striking and perhaps felt pressure to join the crowd. One worker even said of labor meetings that “many came simply to ‘see the fun.’”²⁰⁰ Another worker mentioned that during the May Thirtieth Movement workers were confused at receiving strike pay, stating that “here we are getting money without even working. We didn’t understand anything else.”²⁰¹ Notwithstanding that some workers merely followed the crowd, the importance of strike pay to the May Thirtieth Movement cannot be overstated, as workers had rarely before been able to strike for month long periods or more. In fact, most lasted less than ten days.²⁰² For the first time, strike pay came as a guarantee, rather than as a potential form of redress sought during negotiations with factory owners.²⁰³ Normally, owners could wait out their leaf and packing department laborers, or in the case of a larger strike, divide and conquer the strikers by buying out the machinist or simply hiring new people.


²⁰⁰ Smith, Like Cattle and Horses, 13.

²⁰¹ As quoted in ibid., for original text see Perry, Shanghai on Strike, 150-151.

²⁰² SBSA, Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918, 30.

²⁰³ This would have been known as back pay. Strike pay physically enables workers to go on strike. Worker cooperation with outside organizations was key to funding the Movement. Even though some unions did collect money from workers themselves to help with going on strike it was never on a scale comparable to what the students, communists, and GCC provided. As late as 1924, during the “great strike” at the NBTC’s cigarette factories, workers, with the help of communists, demanded that workers “be paid as usual … during the current work stoppage.” See Greenblatt, ed. “The History of a Shanghai Tobacco Company,” 26. Interestingly, it seems that the Communists had not realized the power of gathering strike pay as a means of mobilizing workers and gaining their cooperation. The May Thirtieth Movement’s strike pay funds figured prominently in many news articles in the North China Herald, indicating a degree of newsworthiness to contemporary readers.
Over the summer that the *Sanba* took place, the workers and their foremen received over $3,000,000 in donations from the public, merchant organizations, Chinese owned businesses, and even the Soviet Union, as an expression of solidarity.\(^\text{204}\) That workers began returning to work once strike funds from the General Labor Union or GLU ran out underscores the practical nature or perhaps the limits of worker participation in the Movement.\(^\text{205}\) However, demands for a larger share of company profits also affected the Chinese-owned NBTC, where workers questioned “whose achievement is it?” during their own strike in late 1924.\(^\text{206}\) Thus, the evidence regarding political motivations behind the strikes points in several directions, ranging from national indignation over foreign privilege and police violence, a class awakening overcoming native place divisions, and perhaps the simplest answer being the best, a greater share of company profits.\(^\text{207}\)

There were myriad obstacles to forming a movement or even unions for workers. These included social barriers such as native place ties and trade skill divisions, physical barriers such as locked doors and compartmentalized work shops, financial barriers limiting workers’ ability to forego work and potentially pay, Number Ones enforcing fictive kinship and gang discipline as means of control, legal barriers to organization enforced by domestic and foreign police forces, and various strike-breaking tactics employed by factory management should workers organize.

\(^{204}\) Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses*, 180.

\(^{205}\) Ibid., 182.


\(^{207}\) Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 250. She makes the point that resentment over an unequal share of the profits was more likely to lead to strikes rather than nationalism.
Without a formal labor dispute process, workers were at an extreme disadvantage due to these obstacles, making their organizational efforts harder to mount and easier to ignore.

Without misplacing their agency in the Movement, the workers cooperated and overcame the many aforementioned obstacles with the help of outside actors, such as the Communists and General Chamber of Commerce. Since outside organizations were able to guarantee compensation in the form of strike pay, workers and their foremen across the city were more likely to participate. That workers quickly returned to their factories once this outside money ran out, highlights how dependent they were on the funding, and also how economics trumped politics in the end. Journalist George E. Sokolsky noticed the same connection and pattern of the Movement when he described the workers’ emphasis on improving wages, rather than working conditions. Indeed, Chinese workers seemed able to tolerate deplorable conditions and poor treatment by their Number Ones, factory owners and the police. They viewed wages differently, however, because their purchasing power was sensitive to fluctuations in the cost of living. Low wages were a problem that workers could not simply ignore since their families also depended on them.

Factory workers’ allies employed concepts of nationalism, class struggle, anti-imperialism, and social justice in an effort to mobilize them. These concepts may have motivated some workers, but it is arguable that they had more immediate, practical concerns. Given that violence and coercion were commonplace for a Chinese worker in 1925, inside and outside of factories, and independent of nationality, workers’ participation in the Movement resulted more

208 SBSA, *Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918*, 26. The Shanghai Bureau of Social Affairs applied special attention to the cost of living, going so far as creating an index presumably to help owners determine appropriate wages.
from a belief that their cooperation would result in practical economic gains like better wages, than from concepts such as nationalism or class.
Chapter 3

Japan’s Role in the Movement’s Demise

Although many of the motivations for the participants were economic in nature, the Movement unfolded at all level of politics. Workers still decided when they were ready to negotiate an end to their strikes, but the availability of strike pay depended on others. Thus, the influence of businessmen and politicians weighed heavily on their decision making. As discussed in Chapter 1, Chinese businessmen had significant money invested in the Sanba because their businesses were closed, and because they were supplying much of the strike pay. They did this in hopes of achieving substantial profits while the boycott persisted against their foreign competitors. They could not reap their rewards though, until their shops and factories opened back up. Moreover, supplying strike pay for all British and Japanese factory workers was unsustainable in the long run. There is little doubt that these financial factors affected the nationalist and anti-imperialist aims of the Movement, but deciding who to continue targeting deserves attention. Chapter 3 explores how Chinese politicians and members of the General Chamber of Commerce perceived Japan’s presence in the city and in China, its role in the incident, and the viability of maintaining the anti-imperialists aims of the Movement.

A mere ten days after the Movement’s beginning, on June 10, 1925, the General Chamber of Commerce’s more moderate participants decided to work with Chief Executive (President) Duan Qirui (1865-1936) and his provisional government at Beijing in order to negotiate an end to the Sanba. The Communist-dominated United Society opposed this alleged compromise, and
wanted to continue targeting all imperialist countries. Two days later the GCC reduced the number of demands previously presented, notably eliminating the demand for the abolition of extraterritoriality, signaling a willingness to reduce indiscriminate targeting of foreign powers.

According to historian Harumi Goto-Shibata, Chinese bankers informed the Japanese Consul-General, Yada Shichitarō (1879-unkn.), that they “intended to relax anti-Japanese agitation gradually and concentrate on the anti-British movement.” In spite of this strategy, there were frequent sympathy strikes against Britain and Japan during June. Shanghai’s Sanba effectively ended on June 26, 1925 when the GCC and United Society published a joint statement directing that the boycott of Japanese goods would end once strikes in the textile mills reached favorable settlement, and that the targeting of the British would continue until all current demands were met. Japanese businesses settled most strikes between mid-August and early-September, while British strikes lasted as late as October. The GCC’s ability to relax efforts against the Japanese seems unexpected given that Japanese businesses in Shanghai experienced more strikes and boycotts from 1918-1932 than other nationalities, and considering that the incident on May 30th was a protest against labor conditions in Japanese cotton mills. An

209 Clifford, *Shanghai, 1925*, 29. That the Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike targeted British and Japanese goods reinforces this point, especially considering that it last longer than Shanghai’s movement.

210 Ibid., 29.

211 Goto-Shibata, *Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31*, 16. A decision by the GCC faction of the Movement was not supported by all stakeholders, especially the Communists. Unfortunately, the decisions’s effectiveness is beyond the scope of the paper.


213 SBSA, *Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918*, 41. Interestingly Japanese businesses profited from the boycott of British goods to the extent that the boycott was actually a boon to their profits by the end of 1925. See Remer, *A Study of Chinese Boycotts*, 111-112.
analysis of Shanghai’s conditions may shed light on the General Chamber of Commerce’s decisions to break away from Communist-influenced demands to target all foreign countries until they “take back the concessions.” Most likely, the Japanese avoided the bulk of Chinese hostilities against them by having a limited imperial, judicial and police presence in Shanghai in comparison to the West, and by benefiting from a national political struggle between Duan Qirui’s (1865-1936) Beijing-based provisional government and the Nationalist Party in Guangzhou.

The foreign presence in China owes its origins to the treaty provisions granted to Great Britain and agreed to by China in the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. The Chinese referred to this agreement as an “unequal treaty,” since Great Britain negotiated it following its victory over the Qing Dynasty in the First Opium War. As a treaty of defeat, the terms were of course unequal. What exacerbated the situation was that by 1860, the United States, France, and Russia had also secured treaties granting them free trade, legal right to residence, tariff autonomy, most favored nation treatment, and extraterritoriality. The provision of extraterritoriality meant that Chinese rules did not apply to foreign businessmen. Instead, their criminal and civil cases retained their home country jurisdiction through a series of consular courts run by their own countrymen. This meant that foreigners and their businesses enjoyed their countries’ sovereignty when in vicinity of the Concessions. This was the case even when Chinese citizens were involved. This imposition of Western law opened China up to the global effects of commerce and the

215 Auslin, Negotiating with Imperialism, 19.
216 Scully, Bargaining With The State From Afar, 5.
international system, and also weakened the image of the foreign Manchu rulers in the eyes of their Han subjects.\footnote{Fairbank, \textit{China: A New History}, 200-205.}

Japan’s modern diplomacy with China generally reflected a use of force or the threat of it, in order to extract beneficial treaty guarantees. Japan, of course, learned this tactic from its own experience with America in the 1850s, and which it subsequently employed against Korea in 1876. The exception to this generalization was the ratification of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty of 1871 that established reciprocal extraterritoriality between the two nations, and allowed Japanese to legally reside in Shanghai. China lost this reciprocity after its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 to 1895.\footnote{Goto-Shibata, \textit{Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31}, 3.} The diplomats of each state negotiated the Treaty of Shimonoseki in the namesake city of Japan, where they announced its terms on April 17, 1895. The treaty granted Japan control of Taiwan (Formosa) and Fengtian province, the independence of Korea from China, 200 million taels as war indemnity, the opening up of other cities in China for Japanese commercial activities, and finally it conferred upon Japan “most-favored-nation treatment” for all future diplomatic actions.\footnote{David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, ed., “The Treaty of Shimonoseki (April 17, 1895)” in \textit{Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present} (Upper Saddle River: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2010), 91-93.} Despite China’s defeat, some European powers viewed the terms of the treaty as too far-reaching, leading to the Triple Intervention by Germany, France, and Russia. The intervention resulted in the return of Fengtian province to China, and an additional 30 million taels owed to Japan.\footnote{Ibid., 92. Information included as an editorial footnote to the primary document.}
Nearly twenty years later, a Japanese Foreign Minister, Hioki Eki (1861-1926), would present the Republic of China’s President, Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), “Japan’s Twenty-One Demands” on January 18, 1915 in Beijing. Prior to this presentation, Japan had moved troops into Shandong Province to the German concession in the city of Qingdao. These demands were designed to formally transfer all “rights, interests, and concessions” previously granted to Germany over to Japan, allow further economic freedoms in South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia, extend the lease of Port Arthur to ninety-nine years, establish joint management of the Chinese Hanyeping Company, and finally a group of seven other controversial articles that China would refuse to ratify. This treaty was ambitious in its expansionist aims. Despite the text of the Twenty-One Demands asserting hopes of “peace … and further strengthening [of] the friendly relations … between the two nations,” peace was contingent upon “the two nations agree[ing]” to Japan’s demands. While Yuan Shikai refused to ratify elements of the treaty dictating joint administration of police departments, new construction of railroads, contractual arrangements regarding the purchase of munitions, and the employment of Japanese advisors in Chinese government, he ultimately signed the treaty, which provoked anti-Japanese demonstrations.

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222 Ibid., 607-608. Germany lost its concession after the 1914 Siege of Qingdao by Japan and Britain.

223 Ibid., 607.


After the end of the World War and the Paris Peace Conferences the international community ratified the Versailles Treaty in April 1919. Despite formal requests from China to regain control of Shandong province from Japan, the latter retained its rights gained from the Twenty-One Demands. The Chinese perceived this as a major betrayal and were furious with their state’s weak response. 3,000 students from Beijing University led a demonstration in front of the gateway of the Imperial Palace known as the Tiananmen on May 4th, 1919. They even “burned down the house of a pro-Japanese cabinet minister and beat the Chinese minister to Japan.” After their repression by local police, the students began a Sanba strike and boycott movement that spread to other cities such as Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Guangzhou. The remarkable showcase of nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment presaged the tactics and perhaps the social networks employed by the participants of the May Thirtieth Movement.

By 1925 Chinese sentiment towards Japan was, at best, ambivalent. Historian Harumi Goto-Shibata notes a general hostility between the two groups of people based on memoirs of Japanese residents of the time. Moreover, strikes at Japanese-owned businesses were more frequent than against any other nationality. Without delving into the actual workplace conditions of factories, as discussed in Chapter 2, about 80% of strikes in Shanghai throughout the late

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1920s were related to conditions of employment, and not overtly political in nature.\textsuperscript{229} For rural Chinese seeking jobs in Shanghai, anti-Japanese sentiment must have been fairly prevalent given the lost war and diplomatic aggression of the decades prior.\textsuperscript{230} Employment under any foreigner, especially the Japanese, may have been seen as a necessary evil for the sake of survival. Boycotts are a better indicator of broad popular support for a social cause than strikes because issues of survival figure less prominently. For example, a strike requires laborers to stop working, stop earning pay, and risk losing their jobs. Boycotts, on the other hand, may require some picket enforcement, but in most cases, alternative products are most likely available, making it easier for all willing consumers to participate, not just workers. Thus, it can be an effective means of inflicting economic damage on another nationality or group even while garnering international attention for a group’s particular grievance. Considering these factors, it is notable that of eleven national boycotts from 1905 to 1931, all but two targeted the Japanese.\textsuperscript{231} Most of these boycotts dealt with national issues of sovereignty pertaining to Manchuria, Shandong, and Port Arthur. The May Thirtieth Movement’s boycott also demanded an end to extraterritoriality, a national issue. However, most of the demands were local in nature, especially in terms of municipal governance.

\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Strikes and Lockouts in Shanghai Since 1918}, 51. Wages were the number one issue.

\textsuperscript{230} Department of State, \textit{Manchuria: Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed by the League of Nations} (hereafter \textit{Lytton Report}), publication no. 378 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), 116. This is a verbatim reprint of the League of Nations report, dated October 1, 1932. The commission found that since World War I propaganda employed during boycotts proved that there was a “degree of hostility toward Japan which the Chinese have come to feel as a result of the political tension between the two countries.” There are methodological problems with using anecdotal evidence, but it is reasonable to take the frequent boycotts of the 1920s as proof of antipathy.

\textsuperscript{231} Remer, \textit{A Study of Chinese Boycotts}, 22. See also \textit{Lytton Report}, 115. Boycott totals: America: 1; Great Britain: 3 (2 of which included Japan). Remer omits two boycotts of 1909 because there was little evidence of enforcement or effectiveness.
Boycotts were so prevalent and effective that Japan petitioned the League of Nations to investigate them as part of the Lytton Commission charged with determining the facts of the Manchurian Incident of 1931.\footnote{232 Remer, \textit{A Study of Chinese Boycotts}, 251.} The investigators of the Lytton Commission found that the boycotts all had a “traceable cause,” and that they were less organized and loosely enforced by picketers prior to 1925. Once the Guomindang (GMD) became involved, boycotts in the late 1920s became more coordinated against Japan because it supported boycott associations, “systemized, and made uniform their efforts. … [and] as a consequence the coercive authority of the organizers became stronger than ever before.”\footnote{233 Department of State, \textit{Lytton Report} (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), 115-116.} The Communists, who agreed to a United Front with the GMD in 1923, played a significant role in organizing the Chinese in the name of the GMD. However, the Lytton Commission did not specifically mention them, perhaps because the GMD was so heavily involved in the 1931 boycott against Japan in protest of the Manchurian incident.

Notwithstanding the political tensions between China and Japan which contributed to the latter being a target of the May Thirtieth Movement, local factors relating to the scale and scope of their presence in Shanghai may have helped Japan avoid prolonged targeting. For example, the Shanghai Mixed Court handled all civil and criminal cases and therefore was a prominent manifestation of the concept of extraterritoriality. For the Chinese, the court may have symbolized foreign governments, especially Britain, which first established the courts. According G.W. Keeton’s 1928 analysis of the Mixed Courts, the Chinese regarded them as an “appendage of the British extraterritorial system in China,” noting that the courts were initially
housed in “a portion of the British Consulate.” Even other foreign powers considered the courts as mostly “British in character,” and that “Anglo-American juridical conceptions have predominated.”

The court’s legal origins date back to an 1864 agreement with the local Shanghai Chinese bureaucrat called a *taotai*. The agreement arranged for consular representation for foreigners involved in legal cases. Moreover, all cases had a *taotai* appointed Chinese magistrate to help administer Chinese law where appropriate. After 1911, when the Qing dynasty collapsed, the foreigner-dominated Shanghai Municipal Counsel (SMC) responsible for governing the International Settlement gained control of the courts from the Chinese state. Thus, Chinese magistrates lost the power to independently decide cases, only gaining it back in 1926 after the return of control of the Mixed Court. After gaining control, the SMC soon added “foreign assessors” that co-chaired the hearing with the magistrate whenever a foreigner was involved in order to ensure that laws were being upheld and that findings were decided fairly. The SMC also appointed and paid these magistrates so that they were arguably no longer independent of political influence. Consequently, the Chinese magistrate’s powers were severely reduced even in purely Chinese cases. These changes did not go without protest, of course, as the Chinese

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234 G.W. Keeton, *The Development of Extraterritoriality in China*, vol. I (New York: Longmans, Green and co., 1928), 379-380. Contemporary perceptions are valuable because they are sometimes lost over time in historical interpretation as the sheer volume of government archival documents may give a different view of how the International Settlement was designed to function versus how it actually functioned.

made the return of the Mixed Courts, one of their formal demands of the May Thirtieth Movement.\footnote{\textit{“Chinese Mediation Body Voices Demands; Hears Views of Strike Officials,”} in \textit{The China Press (1925-1938)}, June 13, 1925, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. (Accessed November 21, 2015). The other demands were: suspension and trials for the policemen, redress for the families of the slain, a formal apology, replacement of some members on the Council, freedom of speech, better treatment of workers and the right to unionize, appointment of Chinese Commissioner of Police, cancellation of proposed bylaws, no further extension of foreign roads outside the settlement, Chinese eligibility to sit on the Council, abolition of extraterritoriality, and the withdrawal of British and Japanese gunboats.}

If Japanese foreign assessors sat on all cases involving Japanese residents then one might expect a distribution of cases and foreign antipathy proportionate to the population of residents. Census results collected in 1925 show that there were 810,279 Chinese and 29,947 foreigners from 39 nations living in Shanghai. The foreign residents consisted of 13,804 Japanese, 5,879 British, 2,766 Russians, 1,942 Americans and 1,391 Portuguese. The remaining nationalities numbered less than a 1,000 people each and totaled roughly 4,000.\footnote{\textit{“Shanghai Census,”} \textit{The Straits Times}, December 26, 1925, \textit{National Library Board, Singapore} \url{http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19251226-1.2.65.aspx}. (Accessed December 6, 2015).} Thus, there were twice as many Japanese as British residing in Shanghai. However, the Japanese lived mostly separate from their Western counterparts for social and financial reasons. Many lived in the Hongkou area known as Little Tokyo, located in the northern part of the Settlement. Some wealthy Japanese lived in the French Concession.\footnote{Goto-Shibata, \textit{Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31}, 5. Some also lived in an adjacent external road area and in other American and British areas. See also Wasserstrom, \textit{Global Shanghai, 1850-2010}, 69.} If one assumes that there were more formal court cases and even informal social disputes involving the Japanese because of their numbers, then anger towards them should have been sufficient cause to keep them a target of the Movement.

Obviously, this was not the case for members of the GGC. Thus, the status of the Mixed Court as
an explanation of why participants of the Movement were willing to focus their demands and efforts solely on the British is less convincing unless one considers other factors.

Despite having more Japanese in the International Settlement, Shanghai governance was overwhelmingly Western in character. For example, the Shanghai Municipal Council consisted of nine elected members: six British, two Japanese, and one American. The distribution of seats reflected the composition of the electorate rather than the general population of foreigners. Only men that owned a large amount of land or paid at least 500 taels in rent, paid taxes, and who belonged to a Ratepayer’s Association could vote in the elections. This amounted to less than 10% of the foreign population. Indeed, the right to govern was closely associated with one’s financial commitments. To this end, Britain had twice the amount of investments as compared to Japan despite having half as many residents. Americans only had a tenth of the level of investment as Britain, yet still retained a seat on the Council. Even though they paid the majority of taxes in the city at the time, no Chinese could vote or hold office. Moreover, only British and American men had ever been the chairman of the Council.

The notable exception to foreign dominance of Settlement governance was that the old walled Chinese city and Chapei district, which had their own municipal government, police and mayor. Despite this apparent self-governance, since the Chinese districts were bordered on several sides by the International Settlement jurisdictional conflicts occurred frequently, and at

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240 Rigby, The May 30 Movement, 141.

241 Ibid., 21-22.
the expense of Chinese sovereignty. According to a former Minister of Justice, Tung Kang, a particularly intrusive aspect of the “evil” Mixed Court was that “recently even [foreign] summons [were] being served on Chinese outside of the city limits of Shanghai without going through the office of the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of the region.” This not only undermined the authority of Chinese officials, but it made the treaty powers’ jurisdiction essentially boundless. Even though there was an advisory board of elite Chinese men that theoretically could influence the Council, they met infrequently and were otherwise ineffective.

Perhaps most telling about Japan’s lack of participation in Shanghai’s governance from a leadership perspective was their absence in helping run the city. Astonishingly, 965 of the 1,076 municipal employees were British. All the heads of the municipal departments pertaining to health, public works, electricity, sewage, finance, fire fighting, and security were also British. The overall image that we have of Shanghai, then, is that there were countless nationalities to be seen by local Chinese (especially the Japanese), but Shanghai’s government and history were overwhelmingly “British in character.” Admittedly, national issues occurring outside of the city still led to numerous boycotts against the Japanese residing within it. So too did labor conditions more frequently lead to strikes at Japanese businesses as compared to other foreign

242 Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31, 3.


244 Borg, American Policy and the Chinese Revolution 1925-1928, 208. From an American legal perspective, serving a summons outside of a jurisdiction does not infringe on another jurisdiction. Regardless of its legality, the Chinese perceived this process as intrusive and wrong.

businesses. However, when group anger towards the city itself occurred, as it did on May 30th, the British seemed the obvious target for generating change. This point was apparent to some foreigners too. One Western journalist at the time echoed this point stating that “the Chinese educated class see in Great Britain the principal obstacle to their avowed purpose of securing China’s freedom.” Thus, the evidence explaining potential motivations is mixed. Since population demographics, court cases, council seats, boycotts, and business connections present a mixed view of the Japanese in Shanghai, it is necessary to analyze how the Shanghai Municipal Police enforced the rule of law.

Policing Shanghai’s international streets was a multi-national effort. Some states taking a larger role than others. While the Chinese city had its own police, the British led the bulk of visible law enforcement efforts. In 1925, the major police organizations were the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) and the French Town’s Concession Police (FCP). Apparently due to a lack of effective enforcement, Shanghai’s opium funded underworld thrived in the French Concession. The FCP’s chief of police and many of its detectives even belonged to Du Yuesheng’s infamous “Green Gang.” The SMP consisted of British officers that rotated throughout the empire’s other outposts like Singapore and India. Its uniformed constables were mostly Sikhs and Chinese. The Sikh policemen were considered by Chinese nationalists to be “symbolic of the most sinister aspect of imperialism.”

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248 “History of police force is traced by speaker,” in *The Chinese Student (Chicago)*, 1:6 (May, 1936): 5 as quoted in Wakeman, 413. Despite the publication date, one can assume that this view pertained to policing circa 1925 because this particular issues topic was the May Thirtieth Movement.
effective, part of the SMP was its Special Branch. The Special Branch consisted of four corps of British, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian detectives. Superintendents of the corps belonged to each respective ethnic group. These detectives maintained networks of informants, points of contact with the underworld, and routinely shared information. Moreover, at least in the cases of the British and Japanese detectives, they would report intelligence back to their home countries via their consulates and military attachés. Roughly totaling 3,000 police, the SMP had 10 officers and 291 foreigners, including Russians, 57 Japanese, 719 Sikhs, 1,754 Chinese, and less than 200 temporary or reserve constables called up during emergencies. Thus, despite the largest foreign population, the Japanese provided the fewest people to the policing of Shanghai, of which most were detectives. Had Japan not provided at least some detectives their access to the intelligence collected by the SMP would have been limited.

Apparently uninterested in performing basic law enforcement duties, Japan still valued the intelligence gathering its detectives and agents performed. An example of this intelligence gathering recounted in the American-owned newspaper, The China Press, occurred two weeks after the Movement started when Chinese organizers held a large meeting at the “Public Recreation Ground” outside of the “Native City.” At this meeting:

two Japanese, dressed as Chinese, were arrested among the crowds at the meeting as spies. The suspicions of those around them were aroused and were confirmed when the two men were questioned as to what school they were attending. They

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249 Wakeman, “Policing Modern Shanghai,” 412-413.

were unable to reply. Violent hands were about to be laid on them when the 
chairman of the meeting intervened and demanded they be given a legal hearing. 
They were arrested and held at a police station for questioning.\textsuperscript{251} 

Evidence is unclear regarding whether or not these “spies” were actually SMP detectives, paid 
informants, or agents of the Japanese government. What is clear is that workers and students 
detected some level of effort by the Japanese to report on their Movement. Thus, Japan may not 
have had constables patrolling the beat, but they were still vested in the process of what was seen 
as coercing the Chinese. 

When it came to activities outside of intelligence gathering, a necessarily clandestine 
activity, the visible policing of Shanghai was at the hands of Sikhs, Chinese, and the British. In 
other words, even when a disturbance takes place at a Japanese factory, British-led forces 
respond to it. For example, during the strikes at the Nagai Wata cotton mills, which preceded the 
incident of May 30th by two weeks, Chinese workers ransacked one mill, getting into a deadly 
fight with Japanese foremen. Enraged, the Chinese workers went to another Japanese mill that 
the SMP was protecting in light of the disturbance. The workers, wanting vengeance, shouted at 
the Sikhs, “We want your carbines to shoot the Japanese!”\textsuperscript{252} While the SMP eventually 
dispersed the angry workers, this example illustrates how Japanese businesses benefitted from 
British policing of its own labor pool. To be clear, workers were hostile towards the Japanese due 

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\item \textsuperscript{251} “Nation-Wide Strike Threat Made As 20,000 Students and Workers Hold Meeting,” \textit{The China Press (1925-1938)}, June 12 1925, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. (Accessed November 21, 2015). There is another pre-May 30th case of spying mentioned in \textit{Shanghai Political & Economic Reports}, 123.
\item \textsuperscript{252} “Riot at Japanese Cotton Mill: Ugly Demonstration: Attempts to Wreck Machinery: Shots Fired: Quiet Late at Night,” in \textit{The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)}, May 23, 1925, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. (Accessed November 5, 2015). This was a British owned newspaper in Shanghai.
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to their poor working conditions. However, Britain had the largest stake in China and was apparently willing to shoulder the contentious task of policing the Chinese. This organizational imbalance in the International Settlement set the conditions for the incident on May 30th. It may have been the main reason why some members of the Movement were willing to shift their efforts away from Japan, and focus them completely on Britain.

On May 30th, students formed lecture teams to protest the killing of a Chinese worker in a Japanese cotton mill two weeks earlier, oppose proposals of the Shanghai Municipal Council to change its governing bylaws, and to demand the release of students arrested for associated demonstrations. After the incident, the U.S. Consul-General at Shanghai, E.S. Cunningham, reported to Secretary of State Kellogg (1856-1937) that:

Yesterday students from local schools and strikers from Japanese mills began organizing a tour of speech making and parade in the International Settlement protesting against the killing of Chinese laborers in Japanese mill, prosecution of strikers in the Mixed Court and contemplated measures of rate payers regarding press regulations and wharfage dues. The police ordered discontinuance which was ignored, whereupon several leaders were arrested and taken to Louza police station on Nanking Road. Soon the students became a threatening mob assaulting 2 foreign police constables, completely held up traffic on Nanking Road and finally attempted to force an entrance to Louza police station threatening the lives of foreigners. [At around 3:30 p.m.] the order was given to fire and 3 were killed, 6 others succumbed last night and probably some 20 others wounded. The police are considered to have acted in the only possible way consistent with the situation.
The mob distributed violent circulars of Bolshevik character proclaiming that the present conditions were due to imperialism of Great Britain, United States, France, and Japan, the anti-Japanese circulars being strongest in language and most numerous.\textsuperscript{253}

Since this was an initial report certain facts are inaccurate: eleven protesters ultimately died from the shooting, some American witnesses testified at criminal proceedings in June that the crowd was not violent and did not charge the police station, and that no one heard the warnings shouted by the head officer, Inspect Everson, prior to his order to shoot. Following the tragic incident occurring that Saturday, workers, students, Communists, and businessmen quickly organized their \textit{Sanba} and “singled out” Japan and Great Britain for attack, though organizers, especially the Communists, targeted all imperialist powers.\textsuperscript{254}

On June 1st, the SMC imposed a curfew, requested military reinforcements, and declared a state of emergency in response to the massive protests involving 50,000 Chinese. The mostly British and American Shanghai Volunteer Corps of approximately 1750 civilians, carried rifles, dressed in khakis, and used water hoses to disperse the Chinese.\textsuperscript{255} Given that Japan was the original inspiration for the May 30th protests, the British were surprised that they were singled out for “the most bitter attack.” In a telegram to the Foreign Office in London, ten days after the protesters’ deaths, British Chargé d’Affaires at Beijing, Michael Palairret, complained to the Foreign Office in London about the political situation and lack of support stating that the “police

\textsuperscript{253} FRUS, May 31, 1925, Vol. I, 647.

\textsuperscript{254} FRUS, June 4, 1925, Vol. I, 652.

are merely the servants of [the] International Municipal Council.” 256 Indicative of this international disunity, the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in China, Ferdinand Mayer, explained in a telegram to the State Department, that many Chinese consider Britain “responsible for [the] Shanghai police.” 257 Even though the United States did fully participate in repressing the Movement for the sake of its citizens and their property, its diplomats could understand why Britain was the main target.

Nonetheless, it may have been the overwhelmingly Western—and arguably disproportionate—response that focused Chinese attention on Britain. Besides the obvious point that it was the British-led SMP that shot the protestors, America, Italy, and Britain were the first to respond to the civil disturbances with force. By June 3rd, 200 American marines, 200 Italian sailors, and 59 Japanese sailors were protecting the Settlement, the latter group guarding a Japanese school. Two British cruisers landed men as well. 258 By June 6th, there were 1750 British and American civilian volunteers, in addition to 1352 military forces. The forces consisted of 154 American marines, 200 Italian sailors, 689 British marines, 309 Japanese sailors and marines, and 22 warships, two of which were Japanese. 259 While the Japanese forces protected their citizens from assaults and guarded against property damage in their living area,


the Western forces attempted to stop riots, actively patrolled streets with machine guns, placed barbed-wire at intersections, enforced curfew, and guarded key infrastructure and factories.\footnote{260}

It is unclear how the SMC distributed security duties—perhaps it was by district—but it seems that American and British forces were aggressive in enforcing martial law. Interestingly, American forces present in Shanghai had an assigned mission similar to the Japanese forces of “protecting American lives and property and that no other action was contemplated,” however America seemed disinterested in enforcing this policy and its actions were more expansive.\footnote{261}

Japanese forces exhibited restraint for several reasons. Since the Japanese had a language barrier with the majority of forces involved, had the largest population to protect with the fewest forces per capita, and because their population was consolidated in the northern area of the Settlement, this level of willingness to police the streets seems rational and consistent with past participation in the city. Moreover, Japan’s subdued response was part of its Foreign Office’s political strategy of de-escalation.

Despite the requests of Japanese businessmen and the Japanese Resident’s Association for an immediate, strong, and united military response in coordination with the British, on June 1st, the Japanese Foreign Office decided on a “low posture” by waiting to send additional forces until the British and Americans did.\footnote{262} This decision upset the Japanese community, which bore


\footnotesize{261 FRUS, June 6, 1925, Vol. I, 658.}

\footnotesize{262 Rigby, \textit{The May 30 Movement}, 139.}
the brunt of sporadic attacks by the Chinese following May 30th.\textsuperscript{263} However, Yoshizawa Kenkichi (1874-1965), the Japanese Minister in Beijing, and Yada Shichitarō (1879-unkn.), the Japanese Consul-General in Shanghai, were afraid to take a strong stance because the whole issue started in the Nagai Wata mills.\textsuperscript{264}

Working conditions at Japanese factories precipitated, or—at a minimum—provided the pretext for the Shanghai demonstrations on May 30th. Moreover, by June 12, Japanese Foreign Minister, Shidehara Kijuro, was still concerned about the Sanba turning into a fully anti-Japanese Movement, although he wanted to cooperate where possible with the British.\textsuperscript{265} Thus, despite the frequent attacks on the Japanese residing in Shanghai, their forces were smaller in number and per capita, and showed greater restraint in comparison to Great Britain and the United States. Moreover, prior to the incident of May 30th, Japan was arguably a free-rider benefiting from the collective security provided by Great Britain, France and the United States.\textsuperscript{266} The Japanese tactic of laying low and the general policy of distancing itself from state-sponsored violence likely contributed to some Chinese participants’ willingness to focus on Great Britain. However, since it is clear that many Chinese harbored hostility towards the Japanese, it may not completely account for the gradual shift of the Movement from anti-foreign to anti-British.


\textsuperscript{264} Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31, 21.

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{266} The Sino-Japanese Business Association was aware that it profited from its relationship with the British, and, at least in June, factory owners did not want to negotiate a separate settlement with workers, which might isolate its British benefactor. See also Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31, 25-26.

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Influential Chinese associated with the Beijing government also advocated for concentrating efforts on the British. Historian Akira Iriye advances the idea that the Movement placed the warlord-backed Beijing government in a difficult position. Since the Guomindang (GMD) Nationalist party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were both anti-warlord and anti-imperialist, and because they were sponsoring the Movement, any success they had would diminish the prestige and legitimacy of the Beijing government. Therefore, the Beijing government, which the GMD opposed, could not completely back the aims of the Movement. Moreover, they “could not seriously entertain antagonizing the treaty powers as a whole,” as this might invite an intervention reminiscent of the Boxer Rebellion.267

A leading Chinese diplomat, Gu Weijun (1887-1985), known to foreigners as Wellington Koo, thus insisted on focusing on the May 30th shooting.268 Of course, adopting such a position would mean dropping many of the political demands presented by the GCC and United Society, something students and Communist would oppose. Apparently on behalf of the Beijing government, a former Vice-Minister of Finance advocated a view similar to that of the Japanese legation in Beijing on June 26th, advising Yoshizawa Kenkichi (1874-1965) that “Japan should break with the British and help the Chinese.” He explained that there was a distinct difference between the labor unrest in Japanese mills, and the “intentional and arrogant shooting by the British policemen.”269 While this position and others were not yet tenable in the minds of the

267 Iriye, After Imperialism, 61-62.
268 Goto-Shibata, Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31, 16.
Japanese, they presented options and perspectives undoubtedly taken into consideration by Japan’s Foreign Office.

While the fragile unity of the GCC and United Society could not openly accommodate excluding Japan from the Sanba at the beginning of the Movement, local businessmen made private overtures towards the Japanese. As early as June 3rd, the president of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, Yu Xiaqing (1863-1945), indicated that the Chinese were willing to solve the labor problem separately from the problem of the shooting. Chinese bankers informed Yoshizawa Kenkichi (1874-1965) that they would gradually relax anti-Japanese agitation and focus increasingly on the British. While the Japanese would spend much of June performing a diplomatic balancing act, Great Britain was busy defending its treaty-port concessions against nationwide protests.

Great Britain’s use of force was a tactic that may have worked in the past, but it only distanced it further from Japan. For example, on June 23rd, British forces shot 130 Chinese, ultimately killing about 50 of the demonstrators on Shamian island in Guangzhou (Canton), leading to a 16 month-long strike and boycott against Britain and Hong Kong. Most historians interpret this event as a sympathy strike that spawned its own movement. What made it particularly effective against the British was that the Guangzhou-based Seamen’s Union tightly controlled China’s dockworkers and sailors, thereby affecting Shanghai commercial interests.

270 Goto-Shibata, *Japan and Britain in Shanghai 1925-31*, 16.
272 Sympathy strikes occur when a group loosely associated with another group demonstrates in solidarity. The benefits of such a strike may accrue to both groups or just the original group on strike. Loosely affiliated organizations benefit from a *quid pro quo* relationship. If both groups belong to the same organization then benefits could arguably accrue to both.
Thus, regardless of the GCC and Beijing government seeking to avoid targeting the Japanese, the GMD’s sponsorship of the anti-imperialist Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike nonetheless affected Japanese product sales. There were also indicators that Chinese shipping firms and Communists were helping fund the Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike and boycott. This amplified the Movement's effects along the coast and the interior.

Reflecting any group’s limits of attempting to control trade, C.F. Remer notes in his contemporary study of Chinese boycotts, that Chinese merchants rerouted their imported Japanese goods during the summer to other northern Chinese ports such as Tianjin and Nanjing. From there the goods reached their consumers in the interior or were stockpiled in warehouses until the strikes ended. He concludes that while Beijing and other cities had anti-imperialist demonstrations that “North China was not the scene of serious and organized anti-Japanese boycotting.” Based on economic data, he further concludes that the further one moved south, the greater the effects of boycotts against Japan, and especially Britain. Another interesting point that might reflect the influence of the Beijing government was that Britain also experienced less effective and shorter boycotting in northern China. It seems that for the Beijing government in power, international trade and the taxes generated from them, superseded any anti-imperialist sentiment. For the opposing GMD/CCP United Front in southern China, boycotts and strike disrupted the status quo and presented opportunities for them in terms of building networks, influence, and money prior to their Northern Expedition.

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273 “Despatch no. 113, dated November 6, 1925 from Mr. Brett to Mr. Austen Chamberlain,” [F5410/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 306.


275 Ibid., 108. It cost the Nationalist $10,000 daily to sustain the Guangzhou-Hong Kong movement.
By the end of June Britain had witnessed a ballooning of the anti-British effects of the Movement. Since the military response had not worked to-date, and because the Chinese merchants were profiting from the boycott, the British-led Shanghai Municipal Council took the unconventional approach of shutting off the power to Chinese factories. The intended result that they would be unable to fund the workers on strike.

Ostensibly because of the British-run Shanghai Electrical Department’s own employees striking, but perhaps instead because of a doubling down of efforts to break the Movement, the department cut power to Chinese textile mills in the city on July 7th. Since the Japanese and British mills were not in operation, Chinese mills heretofore profiting from the strike and boycott shuttered their doors. Chinese factory owners would have found it increasingly difficult to fund the workers’ strike since they were no longer profiting themselves.\(^\text{276}\) Moreover, given several Beijing officials’ efforts to mediate a settlement with the Japanese mills, negotiations between the Japanese and Chinese became all the more likely following the loss of electricity. Since much of this was probably unknown to the British, Britain continued pressing the Japanese government to act in solidarity with them in order to maintain the prestige of the powers in China. However, Britain’s power play had inadvertently pushed the Chinese businessmen into the arms of the Japanese.\(^\text{277}\) If the Chinese could end the strikes at the Japanese mills, then the Electric Department would presumably have to provide electricity to them. This would, in turn, make it easier for the Chinese factory owners to demand access to the newly operational power grid.

\(^{276}\) Rigby, *The May 30 Movement*, 97. In October 1925, when the Judicial Inquiry was estimating how much money to give to family members of the victims, the GCC also made a claim for damages. They estimated their alleged losses at $10,000,000. This could have been a ploy to get more money from the treaty powers.

The Japanese Consul-General at Shanghai, Yada Shichitarō (1879-unkn.), continued his efforts to convince the Japan Cotton Spinners Association, who actually favored Britain’s approach, that settling the strike would not cause them any problems. On July 11, the Association agreed to negotiate a settlement with its workers independent of the British so long as the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) was not punished for the May 30th incident. Chinese workers undoubtedly felt social pressure from their outside “mediators” to begin negotiations since Consul-General Yada would have quickly notified the GCC president, Yu Xiaqing (1863-1945), and the Commissioner of Foreigner Affairs in Shanghai, Xu Yuan (1873-unkn.). Both parties knew that the Chinese businessmen’s coffers were diminishing due to the power outage, and that strike pay would need to follow this same trend if nothing changed. Moreover, since Britain was still being targeted, their settling would not mean defeat or betrayal of the Movement.

Thus, on July 22nd, negotiations began at the Japanese Cotton Mills and successfully concluded on August 11th.278 One might argue that the Beijing government’s initiatives ultimately prevailed as the strike settlement undermined the CCP’s and GMD’s indiscriminate anti-imperialist strategy. On August 18th, in an apparent effort to save face, the CCP’s Central Committee published a retroactive policy, explaining that a strike settlement was needed to prevent the “isolation of the working class.” The Central Committee further directed workers to “urge the northern and southern governments [i.e. the Provisional Government in Beijing and the

278 Ibid., 25-27. See also Rigby, The May 30 Movement, 56-57, for a detailed account of Yu Xiaqing’s mediation efforts.

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GMD in Guangzhou] to form a joint committee to solve these questions." This policy highlights the limited control that the CCP and United Society actually had over the workers. It also underscores the workers’ own agency in ending their strikes, and suggests a different interpretation of the Communists’ role as facilitators of the Movement, rather than its bona fide leaders.

By August 20th, *The China Press* reported that the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce contributed $260,000 to the Japanese mill workers’ strike pay or about $2 to $3 each in order to help reach a settlement with them. Workers that returned within ten days even received four days extra pay as incentive. Evidently hearing about the end of the strikes at the Japanese cotton mills, some 3000 Chinese workers at the British American Tobacco Company factories also attempted to return to work. It was not until an “agitator” urged them to remain on strike, that they went home.

The British were understandably surprised and shocked at Japan’s unilateral action. Britain’s Consul-General in Shanghai, Sidney Barton (1876-1946), expressed his “amazement” to Japanese Consul-General Yada Shichitarō (1879-unkn.) about the Japanese Mill Owner Association’s “treachery,” stating that their “action would cause such a split between the Japanese and British communities in Shanghai as would render co-operation in any form.

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279 *Hsiang-tao*, no. 125, August 18, 1925, as quoted in Rigby, *The May 30 Movement*, 58. *Hsiang-tao* was the weekly newspaper of the CCP.

280 See Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 26-27, for a nuanced explanation of the labor movement. Perry found that beginning with trade guilds that workers had a history of striking. However, she also found that workplace divisions and native-place associations were significant sources of unity and internal friction for the labor movement.

impossible for a long time to come.” Barton further stated that he would provide no assistance in resuming power to the Japanese mills, a vital necessity, since most mills did not have access to their own power. Perhaps knowing that this delaying tactic could not be maintained for long, Barton met with the Chinese Commissioner for Foreign Affairs in Shanghai, Xu Yuan (1873-unkn.), in order to begin negotiations for the return of British mill workers under an agreement similar to that reached by the Japanese.282

This Japanese textile mill strike settlement started a small cascade of further settlements involving the commercial press, sailors working on Japanese ships, and eventually, on September 9th, the Shanghai Electric Department. Nearly a month after they agreed to return to the Japanese mills, Chinese workers began operating their looms and spindles. The boycott against Japanese goods also ended at this time. Finally, with the help of Xu Yuan (1873-unkn.), most British mills and factories would resume work in later in the month. Because of financial support from the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company, the workers at the British American Tobacco Company factories were able to hold out longest of all, remaining on strike until October 10th.283

The May Thirtieth Movement ended in piecemeal fashion, as it was up to the workers themselves to decide when they were ready to return to work. Nonetheless, sustaining a social movement over an extended period takes organization, motivation, and funding. The Chinese businessmen were key to enabling the workers’ strikes and boycotts, and benefited from increased profits. No matter how much additional money the Communists, students, and other

282 “Despatch no. 143, dated August 21, 1925, Enclosure No. 1, from Consul-General Barton to Mr. Palairet,” [F5103/194/10], Shanghai Political & Economic Reports, 247-250.

relief organizations may have collected, funding scores of thousands of demonstrators was ultimately unsustainable. While the Japanese executed their strategy of laying low, northern Chinese businessmen and the Provisional Government of Beijing encouraged a break between the British and Japanese, the latter being seen as the lesser of two evils. They executed this national strategy in spite of the GMD’s efforts to sustain targeting against Britain and Japan. Anti-imperialism and nationalism, then, were contested concepts during the Movement. Chinese elites’ political will and economic pragmatism were just as important as the GMD’s and CCP’s demands to take back the concessions. However, it was not until the British cut Chinese power and profit that Japan’s strategy really became effective. Once the Japanese and Chinese diplomats convinced Japanese mill owners to settle the strike, the May Thirtieth Movement lost unity, as did the treaty powers.
Conclusion

A major theme of the May Thirtieth Movement is Chinese unity against foreign exploitation and aggression. The Chinese were certainly unified by nationalistic feelings, but this sentiment had its limits. From the very beginning, participants had more pragmatic motivations for joining. The business leaders in Shanghai were eager to derail the Shanghai Municipal Council’s proposed changes to its bylaws, which mostly served foreign interests. They also saw the opportunity to profit from a boycott against foreign goods. In order to attain this goal, the business leaders financially supported the costly Sanba and strikes, while simultaneously undermining efforts to take back the concessions. Business leaders and diplomats associated with the Beijing Provisional Government facilitated efforts to narrow the scope of the Movement by secretly encouraging Japan to meet its Chinese workers’ demands. This political process highlighted the differing perceptions of what China and its people needed. The Provisional Government desired stability and favored diplomatic and economic relations with Japan over Britain. Given the past history of Sino-Japanese relations, this slightly surprising position points to the increasing economic dependency of the Provisional Government and northern China on Japan. It seems that Japan’s limited imperial presence in Shanghai, and its focus on business helped it avoid sustained targeting.

Eschewing such pragmatism, the Nationalists, consisting of the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party, advocated targeting all imperialists, especially Britain and Japan. Since the warlord-backed Provisional Government was already in power, it had everything to lose from provoking a unified response from the treaty powers. The Nationalists stood to gain legitimacy and power from a countrywide disruption of the status quo. This conflict of competing state
actors would ultimately culminate in the GMD’s defeat of the northern Chinese warlords and the unification of China.

The framing of the May Thirtieth Movement as part of an ongoing civil war, rather than the opening salvo in a Nationalist revolution that ends in national unity, facilitates an understanding for supervisor and employee collective action. Employees were more concerned with improving their economic conditions than with ousting all foreigners from China. Close study of tobacco factories in Shanghai highlights the exploitation of workers by managements of all nationalities, not just foreign ones. Workers wanted to improve their lives and others were willing to help them by paying them to go on strike. Participating, so long as it benefited them, made sense even when the businessmen funding them were just as complicit in their poor pay normally. At the same time, a natural aim of any nationalistic movement is the achievement of sovereignty. Depending on context, such an aim could simultaneously be rational, but the likelihood of achieving it appear less so.

None of this diminishes the anti-imperialist, proto-nationalistic flavor the social movement took on, in particular for those who looked back on this lost cause, giving it meaning beyond its perceived failure. It does, however, enrich one’s understanding of the limits of imposing such sentiments on historical actors. Viewing business and employee participants as pragmatic and self-interested restores their agency and provides a narrative firmly grounded in fact.
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