Local Politics in the Chinese Cultural Revolution:
Nanjing Under Military Control

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China’s protracted regional conflicts of 1967 and 1968 have long been understood as struggles between conservative and radical forces whose opposed interests were so deeply rooted in existing patterns of power and privilege that they defied the imposition of military control. This study of Nanjing, a key provincial capital that experienced prolonged factional conflict, yields a new explanation: the conflicts were prolonged precisely because they could not be characterized as pitting “conservatives” against “radicals”, making it difficult for central officials, local military forces, or Mao Zedong to decide how to resolve them. Furthermore, Beijing officials, regional military forces, and local civilian cadres were themselves divided against one another, exacerbating and prolonging local conflicts. In competing for approval from central authorities, local factions adopted opportunistic and rapidly shifting political stances designed to portray their opponents as reactionary conservatives—charges that had no basis in fact.

The Chinese Cultural Revolution—in particular the initial two years of mass political conflict that devastated China’s civilian government—was a traumatic and pivotal event in modern Chinese history. It was intensively chronicled and analyzed outside China in its immediate aftermath, and for much of the subsequent decade by social scientists eager to conceptualize and interpret the conflict in structural terms. Academic interest in these events quickly waned outside China in the post-Mao era, almost forgotten, as the country’s remarkable change of course attracted the bulk of scholarly attention. Within China, academic research on the subject could not begin until the post-Mao era, but it was slowed by political sensitivities and discouraged as a promising topic for academic research. With few exceptions, research by historians within China paid scant attention to the social science generalizations of the first wave of foreign scholarship, and despite the availability of much richer source materials in recent years, foreign scholars showed limited interest in re-examining the early structural interpretations of these political events. Despite extensive coverage in memoirs, fiction, and documentary film in recent years of such topics as the...
student red guards and political persecution, scholarly research has lagged behind available sources, and our knowledge of events outside Beijing and Shanghai is still relatively modest.

This article is the product of collaboration between two scholars who have long pursued research on the politics of China during the chaotic years from 1966 to 1968—one of us is a historian based in China, the other a social scientist based abroad. Our interests have converged on the nature of the prolonged political conflicts, and the motives of political combatants, in the vast regions of China outside its two largest cities. Long after political order was restored in Beijing and Shanghai early in 1967, factional conflict raged through much of the country well into 1968. Our motive is to explore the politics of these violent local conflicts, and with new sources re-examine some of the most promising early explanations for them.

Almost all Chinese provinces outside of Beijing and Shanghai experienced pronounced political upheaval and tenuous governmental authority well into 1968, despite the imposition military control early in 1967. From the beginning, western scholarship portrayed these local struggles as a social conflict between “conservative” factions, which attracted groups wedded to the status quo, against more “radical” forces that had a subordinate status. The allegedly deep-seated social interests behind these factions appeared to explain why regional conflicts proved so difficult to control. Because the army’s role was to restore order, it has been viewed as an inherently conservative force, and the local mass factions aligned with military forces have been understood, almost by definition, as themselves conservative (Lee 1978).

Some authors have recently questioned the notion that factional alignments in this period pitted factions with different “conservative” and “radical” orientations toward the status quo. Xu Youyu (1999) argues that the struggles of 1967 in most regions were in fact between rival radical groups that had been united in the earlier challenge to regional governments. He argues that “social conflict” interpretations conflate the late 1966 conflicts, which pitted defenders of the local authorities against their attackers, with later splits among victorious rebels. Throwing doubt on the idea that regional factions had clear and opposed political orientations, he also questions whether they represented different social constituencies. Other recent work ignores the reigning interpretation but provides an overview of provincial conflicts that largely supports Xu Youyu’s views (Bu 2008). Recent Chinese scholarship also paints a different and quite contradictory picture of the army’s role. While the army is praised for curtailing factional battles and restoring the economy, it is also criticized for committing “leftist” errors—exacerbating factional violence and unjustly

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1MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006) devote less attention to regional conflicts and do not raise these interpretive issues.

Critiques of social conflict interpretations of Cultural Revolution factionalism raise a host of issues far beyond the scope of a single article—about the social compositions of factions, how individuals made political choices in ambiguous and changing circumstances, about the relationship between conflict in schools and workplaces and factional conflict at the city and provincial level, and about variation in the structure of conflict across provinces (Walder 2002, 2006, 2009). In this article we focus on one aspect of these broader issues—whether regional conflicts were in fact contests between factions with different political orientations toward the status quo. If they were not, then we will need to offer a new explanation for why these factional struggles were so stubborn and prolonged.

This is a matter of historical interpretation, and it requires a closer look at the evolution of provincial-level conflict than was possible with the limited sources available when the reigning interpretation was established. In Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province, the attempt by local rebel forces to carry out a mass power seizure failed. Central authorities refused to ratify the act, and Jiangsu was instead placed under military control (Dong and Walder 2010). The region subsequently experienced prolonged and violent factional conflict well into 1968—unlike the well-documented case of nearby Shanghai, where a January power seizure was quickly consolidated with central approval under an alliance of civilian and military forces (Perry and Li 1997; Walder 1978).

While Nanjing is one of the many regions that experienced the conflicts that interest us, we cannot claim that it is typical of events in similar provinces nationwide. We examine Nanjing for a simple reason—the first author has been a student and faculty member at Nanjing University, the birthplace of the city’s rebel movement, for more than two decades. He has access to local documentation and has interviewed many of the factional leaders and other political figures of that era (Dong 2009; Dong 2010). This permits us a level of interpretive depth on local politics that is still rare in published scholarship.

**Nanjing Factional Alignments in Early 1967**

When Jiangsu was put under military control on March 5, 1967, local conflicts no longer pitted defenders of the local authorities against their challengers. The coalition of the Party’s defenders collapsed in the wake of Beijing’s praise for the early January overthrow of Shanghai’s party authorities. Nanjing’s rebels were now divided over the power seizure by one wing of the movement on January 26. Unable to agree about representation in the leading group, some of the rebels withdrew from planning for the power seizure, but the others went ahead without them. The rebels then split into two factions, for and against the
power seizure (Dong and Walder 2010). The coalition that carried out the power seizure became known as the “Good” faction (hao pai)—the power seizure was “good”. The opposed coalition was known as the “Crap” faction (pi pai), based on the retort, “haogepi”. We refer to these groups as the “Pro” and “Anti” factions.

Given this split, Beijing refused to ratify the power seizure as they had earlier done in Shanghai. The two factions sent delegations to Beijing in early February and spent the month negotiating with Zhou Enlai and other national officials. Zhou tried to restore Jiangsu First Party Secretary Jiang Weiqing to power, but was prevented from doing so by Maoist officials in the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG). As negotiations wore on, street battles escalated in Nanjing, and the Beijing talks ended with the verdict that both factions were “revolutionary”. Jiangsu was put under Military Control (Dong and Walder 2010).

By the time the army arrived to “support the left”, Nanjing’s political forces were deeply fragmented. Rebels had split into Pro and Anti factions, but the original Pro faction itself had also split. Shortly after the power seizure, the Workers’ General Headquarters, a large alliance in the Pro camp, fell apart. Rebels from construction companies, the dockyards, and pedicab companies led the alliance, but the CCRG decreed that workers from large manufacturing complexes should take over, and on January 28 new leaders were installed (Geng Changxian Interview; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 40; Nongnu ji 1967a; Hongse gongren 1967). The “new” Workers Headquarters pledged allegiance to the Pro faction, but the “old” leaders protested and led their followers into the Anti faction.

Similar splits emerged among rebels in the provincial government offices. At the time of the January 26 power seizure there was only one rebel alliance in government agencies, the Provincial Revolutionary Headquarters. It was composed of department and section heads and white-collar staff, and was led by a department vice-head in the Telecommunications Bureau. These cadres actively supported the power seizure. Shortly after the province was put under military control, however, a new cadre rebel group aligned itself with the Anti faction (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 50). In addition, the leaders of the original Pro faction rebels publicly quarreled over an alleged failure to circulate a key government document, trying to shift blame onto one another. The dispute caused the group’s vice-head to lead a breakaway group into the Anti faction (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967a, 1967b; Nanjing ba erqi 1967).

Given these splits, it was no longer possible to characterize the factions as relatively conservative or radical. The older labels had become meaningless. Occupational groups formerly united in opposition to the Nanjing authorities were now on opposite sides, and groups initially united in support of the power seizure had split again. These were political disputes about participation in the new organs of power and questions of leadership. The Pro faction asserted that power should be seized immediately, and the rebel forces should work out their differences afterwards. The Anti faction argued that rebel unity had to
come first, and only then should a power seizure take place. These initially small political differences between factions with similar occupational profiles were enlarged in the months to come, leading to chronic violent clashes. Through what process did allies evolve into sworn enemies?

We need to explain how initially minor differences became exaggerated to the point of violent confrontation. The answer, we propose, lies not in the characteristics of the factions or their initial political stances, but in the fact that the two sides became entangled in the tactical maneuvering of divided Beijing leaders, who worked at cross-purposes while Mao chose to let local warfare rage on. Beijing’s manipulations intensified local conflicts into a proxy war for the Beijing factions. Local participants were drawn deeply into conflicts that had large stakes, but which they had not anticipated at the outset and which they did not fully understand.

**Local Senior Cadres and “The Cadre Question”**

The imposition of military control was a step toward rebuilding local governments, and Beijing decreed that “revolutionary cadres” must be included. This altered the political situation for cadres, and paradoxically increased the motivation for each side to repudiate selected officials. On the one hand, rival factions now competed to recruit senior cadres, strengthening their forces for the pending alliance. However, cadres who pledged to the other side immediately were denounced as “reactionary”, evidence that the other faction was “conservative”. Except for three members of the Provincial Party Committee already denounced by Beijing, all other provincial leaders were potential recruits. Many of them responded actively to this opportunity to survive the tumult. In March and April both factions declared their intention to “liberate cadres” (*Ba san zhanbao* 1967a, *Ba erqi zhanbao* 1967a; *Dongfanghong kuaibao* 1967; *Nongnu ji* 1967b).

Even before the January power seizure some senior cadres distanced themselves from their embattled superiors by forming a rebel organization. Bureau chiefs in the provincial government established the Jiangsu Revolutionary Rebel Association, which became known as the “old timer’s association” because of their seniority (*Gongren zaofan bao* 1968, *Geming gongren bao* 1968). They initially tried to mediate between the rebels and provincial authorities, but when a power seizure appeared inevitable they joined in and stayed with the Pro faction. The army disbanded the old cadres association when it took control, but the cadres’ ties to the Pro faction endured. Two members of the provincial Secretariat, Li Shiying and Chen Yang, and 52 other Department and Bureau Chiefs declared their support for the Pro faction, and another 100 soon followed them (*Geming gongren bao* 1968; *Gongren zaofan bao* 1968).
The Anti faction also wanted to attract senior cadres, but their prior opposition to the power seizure put them at odds with the many leading cadres who supported it. During the February Beijing negotiations, the Anti faction had only one senior cadre on their side, Gao Xiaoping, head of the provincial United Front Work Department. To make matters worse, at the end of the negotiations in late February the Anti faction denounced the Pro faction as “reformist” precisely for recruiting so many senior cadres (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967c). The rhetoric threatened senior cadres, crippling recruitment efforts.

Hampered in cadre recruitment, the Anti faction attacked the Pro faction’s recruits. They organized rallies to denounce provincial leaders pledged to the Pro faction as architects of the province’s “bourgeois reactionary line”, attacking Li Shiying and Chen Yang, and trying to scare others into leaving the Pro faction. In late May they raided the homes of several senior cadres and published charges of an underground conspiracy of former officials to restore the old order (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967d). In June they claimed to have documents proving that Li Shiying betrayed the Communist Party after being arrested by the Nationalists (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967b; Nanjing gongren 1967).

The local military took these charges against “traitors” seriously. In early May Anti forces kidnapped Li Shiying and took him to the army headquarters, complaining that the Pro faction was hiding provincial cadres, preventing their interrogation by the masses. Wu Dasheng, Deputy Director of the Military Control Committee, criticized the cadre rehabilitation rallies held by the Pro faction and told the Anti-faction rebels that they could deal with cadres like Li Shiying as they saw fit (Gongren zaofanbao 1968).

The Anti faction’s attacks on cadres did not express an inherently harsher assessment of the status quo. It was a tactic to offset the Pro faction’s advantage in recruiting cadres. But this stance had a consequence: it drove provincial cadres more tightly into the arms of the Pro faction, and the response of the military drove a wedge between cadres and the army. By late spring of 1967 civilian cadres were moving into an alliance with the Pro faction, while the army was increasingly drawn to the Anti faction. Originally neutral in the rebel rivalry, civilian cadres and military officers—both bulwarks of the status quo—were being drawn to opposite sides.

**Divisions Within The Nanjing Military**

The army itself was divided. Shortly after the Central Military Commission authorized the army to subdue recalcitrant mass factions, the Nanjing forces suppressed a dozen stubborn groups affiliated with the Pro faction (Bu 2008, 445–63). In this “March Suppression”, hundreds of rebels were imprisoned, and the military opened investigation files on the leaders (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967c; Geng Changxian interview; Ge Zhonglong interview; Li 2002a, 29–30).
The Pro faction was targeted because many of them saw Military Control as an overthrow of their power seizure, and they held key communication and transportation sites that were a military priority. When the army arrived to take over, some Pro faction rebels resisted. The army’s stance was also influenced by Zhou Enlai’s conversations with Xu Shiyou, commander of the Nanjing Military Region, shortly after Military Control was imposed. Zhou instructed Xu to consult with Zeng Bangyuan, a celebrated Nanjing rebel in the Anti faction, about who comprised the “revolutionary left”, and Zhou also told Zeng that Xu Shiyou was “an absolutely loyal fighter for Chairman Mao” (Zeng Bangyuan interview). Zhou favored Zeng because he had been more amenable to Zhou’s proposed compromises in the February negotiations (Dong and Walder 2010).

Zhou’s attitude also influenced Xu’s wife, Tian Pu, a department vice-head under the Provincial Party Committee. She joined the new cadre rebel group that sided with the Anti faction on March 8. Xu Shiyou also met with Anti faction leaders at his home on April 2. Both factions saw this as a sign of Xu’s favor. During the March Suppression and afterwards the Anti faction repeatedly praised the army (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967c, 1967d; Dadao Jiang Weiqing 1968; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967e). The army’s perceived bias quickly became an issue in local politics.

Xu Shiyou’s tilt toward the Anti faction created dissent within the Military Control Committee, especially by its deputy director, Colonel Du Fangping. Du had long supported the Nanjing rebels and was deeply involved in the January power seizure (Dong and Walder 2010; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967f). Shortly after the imposition of military control, Du was co-author of an article in Red Flag about the army’s role in “supporting the revolutionary left” (Liang, Du, and Wu 1967a). It was ghostwritten under the supervision of Lin Jie, a Red Flag Associate Editor on the staff of the CCRG (Geng Changxian interview; Nanjing gongren 1968; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968a).

Du Fangping, it turned out, had longstanding ties to Lin Jie, his subordinate in the army during the 1950s, and Du had supported Lin’s admission to Beijing Normal University’s History Department as a “cadre transfer student” (Geng Changxian interview; Liu yisan zhanbao 1967). Du and Lin resumed contact at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, by which time Lin was closely associated with Kang Sheng and Chen Boda and was on the staff of the CCRG. Du and Lin kept in contact during the February negotiations, and Du expressed frustration with Zhou’s final verdict that “both factions were revolutionary”, a view shared by Lin and the CCRG. Du saw the Pro faction, which had carried out the power seizure, as the true revolutionary left, and argued that the Anti faction should accept this and be absorbed (Jiangsu gongren 1968).

Du was dismayed by Xu Shiyou’s apparent tilt toward the Anti faction. After the Central Military Commission issued new orders to halt the suppression of mass organizations in early April (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 181-183) the Pro faction rebounded and Du became more vocal. From April
to June he talked publicly about the Beijing negotiations, revealing his clash with Zhou Enlai over his effort to “overturn the January power seizure.” (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967f; Dongfanghong zhanbao [Yangzhou] 1967). He insisted that the struggle between the two factions was one between “revolutionaries” and “conservatives”, and the emphasis on unity sacrificed political principles. He also criticized the March Suppression for weakening the revolutionary left and strengthening reformist forces (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967f; Gongren zaofan bao 1968; Jinggangshan 1967; Nanjing ba erqi 1968; Nanjing gongren 1968). Seemingly contradicting his charge that the Anti faction was “conservative”, Du criticized them for opposing the rehabilitation of senior cadres (jiangsu gongren 1968).²

Du’s superiors in the Nanjing Military Region criticized him repeatedly, but Du was unrepentant and leaked news of internal disagreements to the Pro faction. He appealed to Lin Jie and Kang Sheng for support via He Pu, an instructor at the Chinese University of Science and Technology who served as the CCRG’s emissary during four visits to Nanjing between April and June (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968b). The Pro faction launched a major campaign to defend Du and his allies as leftists who represented the correct political line inside the army (Nongnu ji 1967c; Ba san zhanbao 1967b).

**THE COLLAPSE OF MILITARY AUTHORITY**

The armed forces were thus drawn deeply into factional rivalries, splitting their leadership. In early April a Pro faction group from Nanjing University penned a series a wall poster challenges to the army. The leader of the group was Wan Jinhua, a senior in the Math Department. In February, Du Fangping had put Wan in touch with Lin Jie in Beijing, and Wan became an unofficial messenger between Lin and Du afterwards. Wan also met with He Pu during He’s first visit to Nanjing in early April (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968a; Liu yisan zhanbao 1967; Nanjing gongren 1968). The challenge to the army was a product of these behind-the-scenes contacts.

Wan’s group challenged the military’s role nationwide, claiming that they suppressed revolutionary forces and supported conservatives. They asserted that the Nanjing power seizure was unjustly repudiated, and that “certain people” were trying to turn the spearhead of struggle against the “correct” line within the Nanjing Military Region. They also heaped scorn on Xing Wenju, the CCRG representative who had helped to organize the January power seizure but turned into a major supporter of the Anti faction (Dong and Walder 2010), and Gao Xiaoping, the top senior cadre in the Anti faction, calling them

²The obvious retort was that the Pro faction was “reformist”, because they focused all the blame on a small handful of top leaders, permitting the status quo to remain largely intact.
counter-revolutionaries who schemed to overthrow a mass power seizure. The Anti faction counterattacked, calling the wall posters a “counterrevolutionary” attack on “the great People’s Liberation Army.” The Nanjing military’s response was weak: they merely asked the Pro faction to muzzle the critics (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967g). The CCRG transferred their agent Xing Wenju to their Shanghai office, and replaced him with another young Liberation Army Daily reporter, Zhu Qifeng, who was transferred to Nanjing for the first time (Xing Wenju 2008, Xing Wenju interview, Yuan Gang 2008, 68).

The army’s weak response and Xing Wenju’s transfer encouraged the army’s opponents, and violent clashes spread. From April 19 until May 13 there were at least seven violent confrontations in Nanjing (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 54–58). From May 14 to 24, there were 37 more, and from May 24 through mid-June, there was an average of 18 street battles a day (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967e). On May 27 the Anti faction leader at the Nanjing Forestry Institute was killed in a battle at the school (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967f, Nanjing hongweibing 1967). On June 27, the main building of the Nanjing Machinery Institute was destroyed in a fire started during a major battle (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967g, Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967h). The Military Control Committee seemed paralyzed. They refused to move without direct orders from their military superiors or the CCRG (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967i; Zhang Chunqiao 1967).

The collapse of army authority was seen in a wave of Pro faction attacks on the public security apparatus, now directly under the Military Control Committee. The Pro faction demanded the release of all those arrested in March and a clearing of their records. In early June the Pro faction attacked public security organs to seize “black materials” compiled by the army and free their comrades. On June 2 several hundred members of a banned Pro faction railway workers organization demonstrated at the Nanjing Railway Bureau Public Security Office, and they destroyed an exhibition in the building that celebrated the suppression of “counter-revolutionary groups” (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967h). At a similar action on June 17 several hundred demonstrated at another public security station, and a battle ensued after they attempted to force their way into the station. The attackers left the scene only after a telephoned order to disperse from Zhou Enlai (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967j, 1967k). An even larger attack on the Provincial Public Security Bureau took place on June 21, with several hundred invading the building to search for “black materials”. After the Anti faction mobilized more than a thousand members to the scene, the Pro faction activists withdrew from the building with case files and two hostages. Unbowed, the Pro faction sent a force of more than three thousand to the Provincial Public Security Bureau once again on June 24, injuring the army officer in charge as they tried to invade the building (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967l, 1967m). The army’s orders to halt the attacks were completely ignored (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 68–69).
Both sides recognized that Nanjing’s struggles could only be resolved through intervention by central authorities. At the end of June the Military Control Committee sent an Anti faction delegation to Beijing to report the “crimes” of the Pro faction and their ally Du Fangping. Xu Shiyou’s wife, Tian Pu, headed the group. In response, Du Fangping and the Pro faction sent their own delegation (Ge Zhonglong interview).

**Central Intervention Before the Wuhan Incident**

The central government official responsible for monitoring Nanjing was Zhang Chunqiao. Zhang, a key member of the CCRG, had orchestrated the celebrated Shanghai power seizure and was now head of its Revolutionary Committee. Zhang became First Political Commissar of the Nanjing Military Region, which included Shanghai, in early May. Mao personally suggested that Zhang “pay some attention” to Jiangsu (Zhang, Yao, and Du 1967). Mao dispatched Zhang and his deputy Yao Wenyuan to Nanjing. They stayed for one week, and gave speeches at a citywide mass rally on May 14. Zhang was noncommittal—he blandly called on all sides to raise their consciousness, unite, and attack their common enemies. Without clear instructions from Mao, Zhang would not take a stand. His visit had no impact, and during his week in Nanjing there were four major violent clashes (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 56–58).

Zhang’s evasion of key local issues deeply disappointed the Pro Faction, who assumed that Zhang, a radical member of the CCRG, would side with them. They did not realize that after seizing power in Shanghai Zhang had become a staunch advocate of political order and proletarian dictatorship (Walder 1978). They were greatly disappointed by his bland injunction that “both factions are revolutionary”. In their view, this protected the Anti faction and propped up the Military Control Committee. They considered his speech a “huge poisonous weed” (Ge Zhonglong interview).

The senior cadres pledged to the Pro faction appealed to Zhang for an interview, but Zhang ignored them. The cadres were annoyed by a passage in Zhang’s speech on the cadre question, which was an incomprensible tangle of vague political rhetoric. The Anti faction interpreted Zhang’s bland formulation as approval of their stand against the wholesale liberation of cadres. A Pro faction leader who worked for the Nanjing branch of the Xinhua News Agency dispatched an “internal reference” reporting local complaints about Zhang’s speech. One reckless leader went even further, initiating a search for evidence to prove that Zhang Chunqiao had been a traitor before 1949 (Ge Zhonglong interview; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968c).

Zhang met in Beijing on July 12 with delegations from both sides. Ge Zhonglong, representing the Pro faction, complained about the army, and argued that it was absurd that Tian Pu, Xu Shiyou’s wife, represented the other side. Zhang
steered the discussion toward methods for achieving a cease-fire, and repeated many of the same blandishments of his May 14 speech. Zhang refused to respond to direct questions and gave mixed signals. He criticized the local military for being slow to clear up cases of those arrested, but at the end of the meeting he walked directly to Tian Pu and bid her farewell before chatting with anyone else (Ge Zhonglong interview; Zhang Chunqiao 1967).

Zhang’s evasive stance reflected the fact that Mao had yet to decide what to do. When Mao spoke about Nanjing during this period his utterances were cryptic, cavalier, and arguably deranged. In a meeting with military commanders on July 13 he said,

Don’t fear chaos, the more chaos there is, and the longer it goes on, the better. The more chaos goes on, there always emerges a hall of fame, and things will clear up. No matter how chaotic, don’t be afraid. The more afraid you are, the more demons will appear. But no matter what, don’t open fire, whenever you open fire its no good. It’s not possible to have nationwide chaos. Wherever there’s a pustule, there are germs, so they’ll always pop. The chaos in the streets of Nanjing is really fierce, the more I see the happier I get. The more chaotic it gets the more there is a third faction that opposes civil war, opposes armed conflict, and that’s great! (Zhang Chunqiao interjects: “Some say the third faction will take a third road”). What third road is there! Everyone should unite, criticize, you should guide them!” (Mao Zedong 1967).

With instructions like these, the Nanjing military stayed in their barracks as the battles between the two sides escalated. The situation contrasted sharply with Wuhan, where Chen Zaidao’s military forces crushed the faction that challenged them, openly supporting one side.

**SHIFTING CURRENTS AFTER WUHAN**

Nanjing’s Pro faction aimed their fire directly at Xu Shiyou after events that became known nationwide as the “Wuhan Incident”. During the dramatic Wuhan events, Minister of Public Security Xie Fuzhi and CCRG member Wang Li arrived to announce that Chen Zaidao’s Military Control Committee had erred in charging that one of the mass factions was counterrevolutionary. This did not go down well with the powerful faction, the “Million Heroes,” that was openly supported by the army. On July 20 a group of soldiers aligned with them kidnapped Xie and Wang and held them hostage, and they were released only after the direct on-the-scenes intervention of Zhou Enlai. During the uncertainty about the loyalty of the local military Mao Zedong, who was secretly in Wuhan to personally preside over the unity of the factions, was
forced to beat an ignominious retreat to Shanghai (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 205–212; Wang 2006).

These events were treated in Beijing as open defiance. Chen Zaidao and his subordinates were escorted to the capital and blasted with charges that they had attempted a military coup (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006). The “Million Heroes” were condemned as a “conservative” organization. On July 27 the central authorities issued an open letter to Wuhan’s “revolutionary masses” that encouraged them to repudiate Chen Zaidao. In Nanjing, Du Fangping co-authored a front-page article in Xinhua Daily the next day, calling for the overthrow of “capitalist roaders in the army” (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1967f; Liang, Du, and Wu 1967b).

The central authorities’ stance changed rapidly. On July 31 People’s Daily and Red Flag jointly published an editorial that called for “dragging out a handful of capitalist roaders in the army” (Red Flag Editorial Department 1967). The same day a CCRG investigation group, led by He Pu, arrived in Nanjing (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968b; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 78; Xinghuo liaoyuan 1968). They met secretly with Du Fangping and encouraged attacks on Xu Shiyou, and relayed the same message to Pro faction rebels from Nanjing University and local representatives of Kuai Dafu’s Qinghua rebels. The result was an “urgent proclamation” calling for Xu’s overthrow (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968b; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 80).

There followed a series of statements from Beijing encouraging attacks on Xu Shiyou. Lin Jie met a rebel delegation from Wuxi on July 30 and drew direct parallels between Wuhan and Nanjing. He asked whether anyone had yet put up wall posters attacking Xu Shiyou. Around this time Pro faction leader Ge Zhonglong phoned his allies from Beijing and reported that Lin Jie told him that Xu could be attacked. Beijing rebel leader Kuai Dafu told him that the central authorities favored Du Fangping. On August 2 He Pu met with local rebels and compared Xu Shiyou to Chen Zaidao (Ba san zhanbao 1967c; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968c; Ge Zhonglong interview; Xinghuo liaoyuan 1968).

Zhang Chunqiao now changed his tune. He met with Kuai Dafu in Beijing and told him that Xu Shiyou was disloyal, and Kuai sent several hundred of his Qinghua University activists to Nanjing to push the anti-Xu campaign. Zhang also instructed Ge Zhonglong, via Kuai Dafu, to return to Nanjing and join the struggle against Xu, and he had a Shanghai red guard leader inform the Pro faction that the anti-Xu campaign was correct (Ba san zhanbao 1967c; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 79).

With clear encouragement from Beijing, the Pro faction and Du Fangping’s allies in the Nanjing military pushed openly to overthrow Xu Shiyou. They had support from the senior civilian cadres, forces in the Jiangsu Military District, Nanjing Air Force units, and nine military training institutes (Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968d). Under pressure, the army released all those imprisoned in March and cleared their records (Ba san zhanbao 1967d; Xinghuo liaoyuan 436 Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder
1968). Xu Shiyou, understanding the danger he faced, retreated with trusted subordinates to a secret military site in Anhui (Li 2002a, 46–52).

Predictably, Zhou Enlai tried to blunt the campaign against Xu. At an August 11 meeting with Beijing red guards, Zhou warned the students that they should not place all military leaders under suspicion simply because of Chen Zaidao, and the next day he delivered the same message to a Pro faction delegation (Ba erqi zhanbao 1967i; Liu yisan zhanbao 1967; Zhou Enlai 1967). In mid-August Zhou sent a group to Nanjing to mediate the violent factional warfare spreading throughout Jiangsu (CCP Central Committee 1967a; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 79–95).

The anti-Xu forces acted as if they soon expected to form a new local government. At an August 12 conference attended by Du Fangping and Pro faction leaders, a “Jiangsu Province Proletarian Revolutionary Alliance Headquarters” was formed to coordinate the anti-Xu forces, with a “Staff Office” comprised of senior military and civilian cadres. The group’s aspirations were signaled on August 14 and 15 when they formed the “Jiangsu Province Revolutionary Committee Preparatory Committee” (Ba erqi zhanbao 1968; Dongfanghong zhanbao 1968e; Nanjing ba erqi 1968; Xinghuo liaoyuan 1967).

MAO FINALLY DECIDES: XU SHIYOU STAYS

Just as the anti-Xu movement seemed poised for victory, Mao decided that the campaign against the army had gone too far. Still in Shanghai after his retreat from Wuhan, he signaled his intention on August 10 when he deleted the slogan “drag out a handful of capitalist roaders in the army” in a draft document to be issued by the Central Military Commission (Wang Li 2001, 1014). On August 16 he ordered Zhang Chunqiao to fly to Anhui and escort Xu Shiyou safely to Shanghai. On August 18 Mao met with Xu and promised him that neither he nor the Nanjing Military Region would be overthrown (Li 2002b; Xu 1995, 91).

Now that Mao had taken a stand, the CCRG executed another one of its rapid U-turns. During a meeting in mid-August Chen Boda said that the slogan “drag out a handful of capitalist roaders in the army” was wrong, and that “there is only one Chen Zaidao.” Zhang Chunqiao also backpedaled: on August 14 he counseled Du Fangping not to push too hard, and on August 29 he told Zeng Bangyuan to halt the campaign against Xu (Liu yisan zhanbao 1967; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 87). Zhou Enlai of course welcomed the new line, and from August 16 on made absolutely clear in meetings with rebel groups that attacks on the PLA were forbidden (Central Documents Research Office 1997, 181; Liu yisan zhanbao 1967). On August 25 Mao decided that the CCRG radicals who had encouraged attacks on the army “are wrecking the Cultural Revolution and are not good people”. The CCRG’s Wang Li, Guan
Feng, and Lin Jie were made scapegoats and purged, and Qi Benyu would follow them some months later (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 229–233; Schoenhals 2005).

It took the anti-Xu forces two weeks to realize that the tide had turned. Mao’s instructions on the army were not released until August 25 (CCP Central Committee 1967b). Xu Shiyou did nothing to indicate that Mao had assured him of support: he returned to his hiding place in Anhui (Li 2002b; Xu 1995, 91). On August 20 the Party Committee of the PLA Naval Forces sent a telegram to the anti-Xu faction at the Nanjing Naval Academy, telling them that Xu Shiyou was not another Chen Zaidao (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 90–91). Du Fangping and his colleagues interpreted the message as indicating only that the Navy’s top brass was conservative. On August 28 they mobilized more than seventy mass organizations for a demonstration at the headquarters of the Nanjing Military Region, and set up a “Command Post to Drag out Xu Shiyou” (Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 93; Nanjing ba erqi 1968).

On August 29 Zhou Enlai ordered the Nanjing dissidents to disband their “Command Post” and told their leaders, “Xu Shiyou is a member of the proletarian headquarters. The Center’s attitude towards him is one of protection. This is not my personal opinion. This is Chairman Mao’s personal instruction” (Li Wenqing 2002a, 68). The rebels immediately withdrew, but scheduled another rally to denounce Xu for September 2 (Li Wenqing 2002b). The rally was cancelled only after Zhang Chunqiao made two phone calls to tell them that attacks on Xu were off (Ge Zhonglong interview; Geng Changxian interview; Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 95; Nanjing ba erqi 1968).

This ended the challenge to Xu, but the two factions remained at odds. On September 4 Zhou Enlai’s emissaries orchestrated a cease-fire, and the violent clashes subsided, but the two sides still accused one another of serious political errors. In mid-September the Beijing negotiations resumed, but remained deadlocked for three months. To break the impasse, on January 28, 1968, the central authorities denounced both Du Fangping and Gao Xiaoping, leading figures in the Pro and Anti camps, as “black hands” behind factional warfare. This was an obvious threat to stubborn leaders on both sides, and finally broke the deadlock. By the end of March the Jiangsu Province Revolutionary Committee was established, with Xu Shiyou in the top spot (CCP Central Committee 1968). Factional warfare had raged for a full year, prolonged and intensified by the maneuverings of Beijing politicians in the absence of a clear decision from Mao Zedong. The end result was a more confident and repressive military control under Xu Shiyou.

**Conclusion**

The 1967 split in Nanjing’s rebel forces, initially over the timing of the power seizure and participation in the leading group, grew into a prolonged and violent
struggle. The factions cut across identities based on political status and occupation. The split originated in choices made during the course of the movement, not in social or political identities that existed before the movement began. Factional identities were not an expression of the 1966 division between the supporters and opponents of the party authorities. Neither side articulated positions that can be interpreted as either for or against the status quo; their positions on key issues were tactical in nature, designed to earn the approval of supporters in Beijing and the local military, and to discredit those who supported the other side. The conflict pitted local civilian officials against one another; military officers against one another; and local rebel forces—both students and workers—against one another.

Nanjing’s factions initially disagreed only about the timing of the power seizure and the composition of its leadership. Rebels in the Anti faction had fought long and hard during 1966 to overthrow local party authorities and refused to accept their exclusion from the final power seizure and the subsequent charge that they opposed it because they were politically reactionary. The Pro faction fought initially to defend their January actions and later to resist unsympathetic military authorities, and they were encouraged in this by powerful figures in Beijing.

Why did these initial disagreements develop into such deep-seated and violent animosities? The first step is that the Beijing authorities refused to ratify Nanjing’s January power seizure and lend it military backing. They refused because they could not agree on a civilian official of sufficient rank to head the new government, and because the rebel forces were already split (Dong and Walder 2010). Here the contrast with Shanghai is instructive. Zhang Chunqiao, a key member of the CCRG who was also a senior member of Shanghai’s Party Secretariat, managed to place himself at the head of a large rebel insurgency and was quickly installed as the leader of a new revolutionary committee. He had Mao’s unwavering support and used local military forces to suppress an incipient “Anti” faction of student and worker rebels who saw his seizure of power as usurpation by an incumbent senior cadre (Perry and Li 1997, 119–44; Walder 1978, 58–63). Divisions in the Shanghai rebel camp were suppressed and the city was spared the prolonged conflicts common in other regions.

We still need to explain why the initial splits in Nanjing deepened into such prolonged and violent conflict. Here the intimate involvement of Beijing politicians, who worked at cross-purposes, manipulating and prolonging local conflict, is crucial. Nanjing’s rival rebels were drawn into the schemes of Beijing officials who deeply distrusted one another and were trying to shape political outcomes in the many provinces where revolutionary committees had yet to form. Nanjing factions understood that they could not succeed without support from Beijing, and they welcomed support wherever they could get it—from the CCRG, Premier Zhou Enlai, the army, and ultimately from Mao Zedong.
In responding to overtures from these actors, Nanjing's rebels were drawn into Beijing leadership rivalries that they did not fully understand, and became active participants in what was in effect a local proxy war.

The main outlines of this bureaucratic struggle are clear. Members of the CCRG deeply distrusted Zhou Enlai, who was clearly motivated to restore order and industrial production and blunt the movement's destructive tendencies. Zhou's failed effort in February 1967 to restore Jiangsu's First Party Secretary Jiang Weiqing as head of a new revolutionary committee deepened their suspicions (Dong and Walder 2010). The CCRG also suspected Zhou's influence in Xu Shiyou's tilt toward the Anti faction. After Xu's wife became a leading cadre in the Anti camp, and after the armed forces arrested hundreds of Pro faction activists who resisted military control, the CCRG took covert counter-measures against him. These events culminated in CCRG attacks on the armed forces nationwide in the summer of 1967. The attackers charged that military forces were restoring order at the expense a rebel movement that represented Mao's aspirations (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 175–83).

The CCRG subverted military control in two ways. They created several back-channel contacts with Pro faction leaders and encouraged resistance to the army and attacks on Xu Shiyou. And they actively encouraged officers on Nanjing's Military Control Committee to challenge Xu Shiyou in an open alliance with the Pro faction. Throughout this period the Pro faction felt that they had clear backing from Beijing. In response, and in the absence of a clear decision from Mao about Xu's fate, the army retreated into a defensive crouch, refusing to act as battles between Pro and Anti rebel forces tore Nanjing apart in the summer of 1967.

The Anti faction supported Xu Shiyou and the Military Control Committee. They did so not out of any desire to restore the status quo ante, and certainly not because they had more vested interests in the status quo than the Pro faction, which was filled with former provincial officials. They supported the army solely because that was the only way to enforce their claim that the January 26 power seizure was illegitimate because it excluded them. They saw themselves as part of the "revolutionary left", and pointed to the many senior civilian cadres in the Pro faction as evidence for their charge that their opponents were attempting a conservative restoration. The Pro faction, for its part, charged that the army was trying to reverse a genuine mass power seizure, and that the Anti faction acted on behalf of reactionary forces opposed to the Cultural Revolution. The contradictory claims of the two sides each had surface plausibility, but their conflict cannot be sensibly understood as a struggle between conservative and radical camps in any meaningful sense, however much the rhetoric on both sides sought to frame it as such.

The restrained and largely defensive stance of the Nanjing military after March 1967 contrasts sharply with that of their counterparts in the well-
documented case of Wuhan. Events in Wuhan began just as they had in Nanjing—two wings of the formerly united rebel movement split due to disagreements about power sharing in their January power seizure—yielding “pro” and “anti” factions. The Wuhan military also suppressed Pro faction rebels who resisted the imposition of military control, though with much greater force, essentially eliminating them. The Wuhan story thereafter diverges sharply from Nanjing’s. After Wuhan’s Anti faction published an editorial that offended the local military, General Chen Zaidao used this as a pretext to suppress the Anti faction as well, and openly encouraged the revival of the defeated “conservative” forces of 1966 that had defended party rule (Wang 1995, 112–60; 2006). This created the confrontation that made Wuhan a major national issue, and led to the nationwide attacks on military forces that threatened Xu Shiyou in Nanjing. In the end, an enigmatic Mao reversed himself and decreed that attacks on the army must stop, radical young members of the CCRG must be purged, and that Xu Shiyou would stay, causing the CCRG and Zhang Chunqiao to hastily call off their subversion campaign. After so many months of mutual recrimination and street violence, the prospects for rebel unity were destroyed, and Mao was forced to resort to a coercive and thinly disguised form of military rule.

The idea that factional conflict in China in 1967 was prolonged and violent because it expressed the opposed interests of different social groups is an appealing argument, but finds little support in the case of Nanjing. The historical record is in many ways more intriguing: two groups that initially were allies, and had almost identical memberships, disagreed over tactical issues that escalated into perceived issues of political principle. Each side sought support from politicians in Beijing and local military forces who might resolve the dispute in their favor. In so doing, they were drawn into the machinations of bitter rivals in the national leadership who energetically sought to undermine one another and shape local political outcomes. Local rebels were not motivated by the same issues that divided factions in the capital. They needed backing from Beijing, and sought support wherever they could get it. Whether the Nanjing, Wuhan, or some other variant of local conflict predominated in the many other provinces placed under military control in 1967 awaits similarly contextualized analyses of other regions. It is clear, however, that our grand narrative of Cultural Revolution political conflict is due for a thorough re-examination.

Acknowledgements

Dong Guoqiang’s Humanities and International Studies Fellowship at the Stanford Center for the Humanities facilitated our collaboration during the 2008–2009 academic year. The authors are grateful to the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center of Stanford University for research funding.
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