



East
Asian
History

NUMBER 11 · JUNE 1996 THE CONTINUATION OF *Papers on Far Eastern History*

Institute of Advanced Studies
Australian National University

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This is the eleventh issue of *East Asian History* in the series previously entitled *Papers on Far Eastern History*. The journal is published twice a year.

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Subscription Enquiries to Subscriptions, *East Asian History*, at the above address
Annual Subscription Australia A\$45 Overseas US\$45 (for two issues)

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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover picture G. E. Morrison with his two 'adopted' children, sons of his head servant, photographed in 1905 in the front courtyard of his house at 98 Wang-fu-ching Ta-chieh, Peking

THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION IN CHINA

 C. P. Fitzgerald

George Ernest Morrison first went to China in 1895, and from that time until his death in 1920 he lived in the Far East continuously, first as Peking correspondent of the London *Times*, finally as political adviser to the President of China. His son, Ian Morrison, whose tragic death last summer in Korea cut short a career of great promise, had already succeeded to his father's old post and was correspondent for *The Times* in the Far East.¹ The lives of these two Australians, together with the career of a third, W. H. Donald,² thus cover the whole period of the Chinese Revolution from its first preliminary portents in the Reform Movement of 1898 to the final tremendous explosion of our own times. Dr Morrison, perhaps the most famous of all the correspondents of *The Times*, did more than any man of his epoch to make the affairs of China intelligible to the Western world. The work of his son, nearly half a century later, will be remembered for the same gifts: cool, logical appraisal of conflicting reports and shrewd insight into the underlying trends which determine events. As a tribute to the memory of father and son I am going this evening to endeavour to examine the underlying causes of this great upheaval and trace the thread of the Chinese revolutionary tradition from earlier times up to the critical moment at which we find ourselves today.

It is often believed that the revolutionary tradition is something unique to the Western world, an idea born of the French Revolution; but in China there has from very ancient times existed a theory of revolution, which, although it was expressed in other terms, has yet many of the same basic ideas as that of the West. The Chinese, it is true, are not romantic, particularly in politics. China has never been a home of lost causes, and in the long range of Chinese history there has never been a restoration, or even a movement of importance with such an end in view. This absence of the romantic outlook on politics is one of the most important differences between the Chinese tradition and our own, and only when the Chinese matter-of-fact approach

The 13th George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology delivered on 19 March 1951 and first published by the ANU in the same year. Mr Fitzgerald (1902–92), at the time a Visiting Reader in Oriental Studies at the Australian National University, was later foundation Professor of the Department of Far Eastern History of its Institute of Advanced Studies.

The assistance of Dr Lo Hui-min in preparing this article for reprinting is gratefully acknowledged. [—Ed.]

¹ Ian Ernest McLeavy Morrison (1913–1950), the eldest of G. E. Morrison's three sons, met his death while covering the Korean War as a correspondent for *The Times*. [—LHM.]

² William Henry Donald (1875–1946) first went to China through Morrison's introduction. The two became lifelong friends and kept in close contact even while working for politically opposed camps in China. Interned by the Japanese after the outbreak of the Pacific War, Donald died in Shanghai in November 1946 on the eve of the outbreak of the Civil War between the Communists and Chiang Kai-shek. His papers, which promised to be of great value to historians of the China of his time, have never surfaced, and are thought to have been destroyed by Donald himself shortly before his death. [—LHM.]

is understood can we appreciate the reasons why the Chinese revolution has developed as it has. The second main difference in the Chinese outlook is that in China Content has always mattered more than Form; Behaviour is more important than Belief; institutions are less significant than the character of the men who hold power. For this reason, although the Chinese have written much on the philosophy of government, they have never until the modern age questioned its form. All Chinese political philosophy was directed to the question of how to make the Monarch good; never was Monarchy as such questioned or doubted. Equally, dogmatic religion has never made headway in China, and therefore, although there exists a vast literature of ethical teaching and philosophic discussion, there has never been a Chinese institution corresponding to the Christian Church or the organised power of Islam.

The absence of the romantic outlook and the lack of an organised priesthood left the Chinese scholar official a clear field for the formation of political and ethical theory. The political scientists of early China were also practical administrators, and it was they who formulated a famous theory which has deeply influenced all Chinese thought. The theory of the Mandate of Heaven—*t'ien-ming* 天命 in Chinese—is certainly very early, but it is not necessary here to enter into the vexed question of its origin. It was stated in a famous passage by the philosopher Mencius 孟子, who, being a Confucian, was supposed to venerate the early sage kings of China. An opponent, seeking to embarrass the sage, asked him how he reconciled the fact that the founder of the Chou 周 dynasty, though a former minister of the preceding Shang 商 court, had rebelled against his sovereign and put him to death. Was such conduct right in a sage? Mencius replied: "I have heard of the execution of the criminal Chou Hsin, but not that a minister murdered his sovereign." Mencius thus claims that a king who governs badly, as Chou Hsin 紂 of the Shang governed, ceases to be a real king and his murder is not a crime, but an execution. From this and similar concepts later ages developed the full theory of the Mandate of Heaven. In China there was no Divine Right of Kings. A king, or later an emperor, ruled by virtue of having received the Mandate of Heaven, a commission to rule the earth, limited by the condition that such rule must be just, sincere and righteous. If this condition was not fulfilled, then the monarch could no longer expect that his subjects would remain loyal and obedient. Rebellion against bad government was justified, and if the rebel succeeded and overturned the dynasty, by this fact it was plain that the Mandate of Heaven has passed from the fallen house and had been entrusted to the successful rebel.

This extremely pragmatic theory, by which success was made a virtue and failure became a crime, has lived for centuries as the true unwritten Chinese constitution. It also constituted a continuing revolutionary tradition of which every dynasty had to be aware. It may be asked how this theory operated in practice. A study of Chinese history shows that as a matter of fact the great rebellions rarely unseated the dynasty of the day. They shook the power of

the throne, they destroyed the administrative system and bred military rule in the provinces, but they were usually suppressed. Then, a few years later, the weak and helpless dynasty would be dethroned by one of the military adventurers called to power in the period when the late popular revolt was raging. This pattern is so recurrent that it must relate to some abiding social condition which continued in force for many centuries. As early as the Han 漢 dynasty in the third century AD, the empire was shaken by the first of the great peasant rebellions, that of the Yellow Turbans 黃巾. This movement ravaged the provinces for years but was finally suppressed by newly raised armies. Then, a few years later, the army commanders who now controlled the government made the powerless emperor their plaything, and finally, almost unnoticed, the Han dynasty was dethroned.

Several centuries later, towards the end of the great T'ang 唐 dynasty, the same series of events occurred. A great rebellion, peasant in support, led by a disappointed office seeker, swept the empire and even took the capital. Armies raised by the Court finally crushed the rebels. Within twenty years, however, these new armies, warring among themselves, swept the T'ang empire from the throne. The same pattern can be seen in the most recent dynasty, that of the Manchus. The T'ai P'ing 太平 Rebellion, which in the middle of the nineteenth century all but dethroned the dynasty, was a peasant movement also led by a disgruntled member of the literate class. It, too, was finally suppressed, and as before, a generation later the feeble Manchu Court was easily turned off the throne by an ambitious militarist, Yuan Shih-k'ai 袁世凱.

Only one exception exists, and when this case is examined it gives a clue to the meaning of these events. In the later part of the fourteenth century China was under the rule of the Mongol Yuan 元 dynasty, an alien and hated domination, which had denied to the Chinese literate class their traditional role in the government, and imported an international bureaucracy of foreign adventurers to rule the country. One of these, incidentally, was Marco Polo. After fifty years or so the Mongol rule became not only oppressive but inefficient. Rebellions broke out, and finally one of the leaders of these popular risings, a man of base origin, son of famine refugees, who had been in turn a beggar, a Buddhist monk, a bandit and a rebel leader, this man of the people founded the Ming dynasty and died forty years later one of the greatest emperors of China. Here indeed is the Mandate of Heaven in full operation. But the case of Ming Hung-wu 明洪武 is not at all typical. In his day the Chinese were, perhaps for the first time in their history, moved by a genuine wave of true national feeling, and, above all, the ruling dynasty had antagonised and ignored the scholar class, China's traditional rulers.

Therein is the secret of Ming Hung-wu's success and the failure of the Yellow Turbans, Huang Ch'ao 黃巢 of the T'ang and the T'ai P'ing Heavenly King. All were popular revolts of the peasants against gross misgovernment. But only the rising of Ming Hung-wu had the support of the scholars also. He alone had *both* the ingredients for successful revolution: the support of the peasantry and the backing of the literate scholar-gentry.

Figure 1

Han Kao-tsu (source: Li-tai ku-jen-tsan, edition 1476—courtesy Prof. Liu Ts'un-yan)



If we consider the origin and actions of the successful founders of the great dynastic regimes we find the same facts. The founder of the Han dynasty was a peasant soldier, hardly literate. He won the empire by military force, and at first showed little interest in the scholars. According to tradition, one day, as he was riding forth from his palace, a scholar knelt before him, offering a bundle of books and saying: "Majesty, I have here something you need to govern the Empire." Han Kao-tsu 漢高祖 smacked his saddle and replied: "On horseback I conquered the Empire: what need have I of books?" To which the scholar replied: "Yes. Majesty, but can you also govern it from the saddle?" Struck by this question, Han Kao-tsu henceforth employed scholars in his government. The story, probably legendary, certainly epitomises the well-known change of conduct followed by the first Han Emperor, which went far to consolidate his empire.

The founder of the T'ang, the true founder, was the second son of the titular emperor of that dynasty and was both a scholar himself and a soldier of genius. He is the ideal emperor of Chinese history, the perfect example of what the Chinese hoped for in their rulers. But he, too, was careful to enlist the support of the people by good treatment and, though an aristocrat, did not rely wholly on his fellows. The founder of the Sung 宋, a professional soldier, who gained power by a mutiny of the army, consolidated his rule by disbanding that army and relieving the wants of the people. Thus it can be seen that the great peasant revolts failed unless in exceptional circumstances they had the support of the scholar-gentry also, and the founders of the great dynasties, men of varying origin, all succeeded through combining the support of the scholars with real measures of relief for the peasants. Dynasties founded by military tyrants who neglected one or other of these ruled did not endure. Dynasties, such as the Manchu Ch'ing 清 dynasty, which were founded by nomad conquerors, had to conciliate the Chinese scholars to survive, and to relieve the peasants if they were to remain in power. The Mongols, who did neither, hardly held the throne for more than a full lifetime.

With this background it seems as if the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911 was an event fully in accordance with Chinese historical tradition, and should have been followed by the usurpation of some military man, who, if really able, might have founded an enduring dynasty, but would more probably have been the first of a series of short-lived regimes forming what the Chinese call a 'Period of Confusion'. Looked at from one point of view, the events since the fall of the Manchus have been just that, and the transitory regimes of the early Republic, the Kuomintang 國民黨, and the Japanese invasion could be seen as the brief dynasties of such an interim, before the foundation of the new, mighty and enduring dynasty, in this case the People's Republic of China.

But such an interpretation of the Chinese Revolution would be altogether

too formalistic and conservative. Other and mighty influences have come to disrupt and distort the ancient pattern of dynastic succession. Two great changes had occurred to alter the whole framework in which Chinese history had hitherto operated. The conquests of the Manchu emperors in Mongolia, combined with the advance of Russia across the Siberian steppes, had eliminated for ever the age-old danger of nomad invasion from which China had suffered since the dawn of history. It had, moreover, brought China into contact with the Russian Empire and thus opened a channel through which in due course powerful new influences were to reach the Chinese culture. At the same time the European nations had found and developed the sea route to the Far East. Thus ended China's long geographical isolation, and the mental attitudes which that isolation had bred, and which were appropriate to such a condition, were found wholly unfitted to cope with the new situation. The Manchu indifference to the power of the Western world, their unwillingness to admit the existence of that power, or to prepare to meet the dangers which now threatened from the sea, were a consequence of the long and traditional preoccupation with the land frontier to the north, the line of the Wall, which had for all Chinese governments been the only real problem of foreign affairs. It was found too difficult, after this ancient problem had at last, by the conquest of Mongolia, been settled for ever, to wrench the mind away from it and realise that the sea coast, hitherto unimportant as a frontier, was now the region in which peril appeared. One may compare the preoccupation of the British military in India with the North-West Frontier, and their inability to realise that their real danger came from the north-east if Japan should invade China.

Another domestic factor had entirely changed the Chinese scene. During the long internal peace of the Manchu dynasty the Chinese population had grown, possibly by over one hundred millions. Pressure on the land in a purely agrarian economy was becoming intense. Moreover, the advent of the Western traders and the industrialisation of Japan had flooded China with cheap manufactures which drove out and destroyed the handicraft industries which had helped the peasants to make ends meet. In the latter years of the Manchu dynasty the peasants were becoming more and more numerous and poorer every year. The Westerners, seeing the growth of their trading cities on the coast, where formerly there had only been mud flats or fishing ports, boasted of the benefits they were bringing to China. In the villages these changes were seen in another light. The increasing misery of the people was a ferment beneath the surface of China's political life; an explosive force which, if too long compressed, would in the end blow the whole social system to fragments in a tremendous explosion. We in our day have seen this happen.

The course of the Chinese Revolution from 1911 to the present year, 1951, falls naturally into four periods, each almost exactly a decade in length. The first ten years, from 1911 to 1921, is the period known in China as the age of the warlords, the chaotic rule of military dictators. In the second decade, from 1921 to 1931, the Revolution got its second wind, and rise of the Kuo-

Figure 2

Yuan Shih-k'ai, born in 1859, was regarded as the ablest statesman of his time and the potential saviour of the Chinese nation, but died an infamous villain, having betrayed the sovereign to whom he owed his rise, his followers, and finally himself, on 6 June 1916 [—LHM]



mintang, the Nationalist Party, appeared to be destined to settle the problems of the nation. In the third period, from 1931 to 1941, Japanese aggression and invasion dominated all other factors and created new problems; while in the final decade, from 1941 to 1951, the Chinese Revolution ceased to be a local and national crisis and became a movement caught up in the full tide of world affairs, in which it plays a part, the significance of which is only now becoming painfully clear to the West.

The Manchu dynasty abdicated the throne in February 1911, not as the direct result of the republican rising led by Dr Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙, but because its own commander-in-chief, the reactionary and ambitious Yuan Shih-k'ai, who expected to found a new dynasty, compelled the Regent to renounce power. Yuan in fact, being an old-time scholar as well as a general, expected that the well-tried pattern of history would now repeat itself. In the first years of the new regime he became President of the Republic, and then skilfully used his power to eliminate the leading republicans and place his own supporters in the key posts. Early in 1916 he was ready to carry out his coup and the new dynasty was proclaimed. The result was a great surprise both to the pretender and to the foreign powers, who all favoured his attempt.

There were at once risings in remote provinces, followed by secessions in nearer garrisons, and in a wide movement of protest among the educated class. Yuan's own generals were either luke-warm or openly opposed him. He had to renounce his plans and died a few months later, a broken man. The failure of Yuan and the most unexpected sentiment against the monarchy seemed inexplicable to most observers at the time and requires explanation. Three factors worked against Yuan. Firstly, his own character, which was treacherous and deceitful. He had already twice betrayed those who had put their trust in him; there was the Emperor Kuang-hsü 光緒, in the reform movement of 1898, who had trusted Yuan, and had been by him betrayed to the ruthless and reactionary Empress Dowager. Then the Regent, who had made Yuan commander-in-chief against the republicans, only to be turned off the throne by the man on whom he relied. The Chinese value loyalty highly, far more highly than they value liberty or what we call democratic freedoms, and the people never respected or trusted Yuan, who is now bracketed with two or three other famous traitors in popular memory. Secondly, Japan worked against the pretender, fearing that his success would result in the founding of a strong China. The Japanese Twenty-One Demands, presented at pistol-point to Yuan on the eve of his monarchical coup, amounted to the establishment of a protectorate over China. If Yuan had had the courage and insight to reject these outright and lead the nation in what might have been a desperate, and certainly at first a losing, war, he would perhaps have become a real national leader and might have also become the founder of an enduring dynasty, for China was by no means truly republican or democratic in sentiment in 1916. He chose, however, to accept many of the demands and intrigue with foreign nations to obtain their support in rejecting or postponing the others. In this way he angered the Japanese, lost face with the Chinese, and got no real or useful help from the foreign nations,

who were as ever, too divided among themselves and too jealous of each other to agree on any positive or effective China policy.

The third factor which worked for Yuan's downfall was the jealousy and ambition of his subordinates, who feared that as the generals and ministers of an emperor they would cut a smaller figure than might be possible as rival contenders for supreme power. Added to this was the old hostility of the south for a northerner (Yuan was from Honan) and the vague anti-monarchical sentiment of many of the younger literate class. It is certainly not the case that Yuan was frustrated by a surge of democratic feeling or republican enthusiasm; the republican party led by Dr Sun Yat-sen played practically no part in his overthrow. Yuan's coup had thus failed to win the support of the scholars and had none from the peasants.

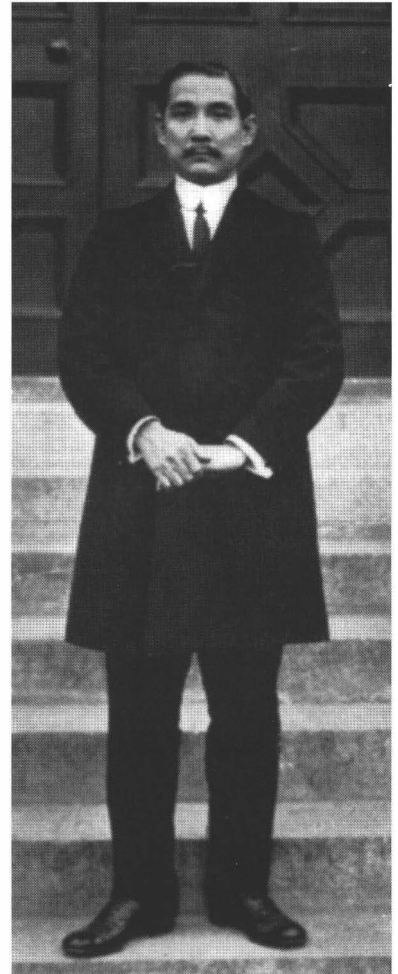
This was one of the prime causes of the anarchy which followed his death. The republicans entrenched themselves in Canton, where Dr Sun for some years headed a precarious separate government, often menaced and only fitfully supported by the local militarists. The Peking government became the prize for contending military chieftains, who ruled their provinces as independent autocrats. At this time China was really divided into some ten or twelve shifting military despotisms, the Peking government being little more than a convenient symbol for use in diplomatic intercourse and loan raising. Although it was no longer fashionable to proclaim the foundation of a dynasty as the aim, almost all the militarists either had that intention or toyed with the idea of restoring the Manchus as puppet rulers. One actually carried out such a restoration in 1917, which lasted a week. As men they were for the most part destitute of any political ideas, bad administrators, corrupt, and brutal.

The period of military chaos lasting from 1917 to 1927 had a profound and lasting effect on China, though little of its real importance was realised at the time. In the first place the democratic Republican ideal was wholly discredited, since the forms of this system were used by the military despots to cover their acts. The people, the scholars, and the revolutionaries themselves were now all disillusioned with the kind of government so confidently imported a few years earlier from Europe and America. The next phase of the revolution was about to begin, and in it, all unnoticed, the ideological initiative had passed to Russia.

A second profound effect of the warlord rule was the rising distress of the peasantry. Under the old system of Imperial China the landlord class, who were not large-scale holders in the European manner, lived in their villages, having intimate contact with their tenants, and without any military force to overawe the peasants. When harvests were good they exacted their rents; when harvests were poor, they were wise enough to remit a part of the rent due, and when famine came, if they were wise, they opened their own granaries and relieved the starving. If they were too greedy and too heartless, the peasants, who were far more numerous, would rise and slay them. There was no military force worth the name in the interior. If a rebellion occurred the Emperor either raised forces for the occasion or sent commissioners to

Figure 3

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), regarded as a villain and a charlatan by not a few independent foreign and Chinese observers, was to die a patriotic hero and has since been revered as the 'Father of the Republic' by Communists and Nationalists alike. In this guise he has continued to provide writers and historians with a living, stale and tiresome though these stories have increasingly become [—LHM]



enquire into the cause, remit taxation and distribute rice or grain. This, with the arrest and execution of the rapacious officials guilty of too much squeeze, often served to tranquillise the trouble.

Under the Republic all was changed; vast armies of armed hooligans called soldiers wandered over the country, devouring the crops and robbing the villagers. The rich landlords fled from such conditions to the safety of the big cities—often to the foreign concessions in the Treaty Ports. They left agents behind to collect their rents, without knowing or caring what the harvests might be. The agents found that the easiest way to carry out their tasks, and enrich themselves at the same time, was to go into partnership with the local military. Soldiers would be lent to help exact the full rent, the full tax and even taxes for years to come. If the peasants resisted, they could now be shot, and whereas before the peasant with his spear or scythe was almost a match for a soldier armed with a sword or spear, the new army, with its rifles and guns, tyrannised supreme. All went to rack and ruin: the dykes which hold back the flood-waters were not repaired; the military had embezzled the money set aside for the purpose. There was no remission of rent or tax in bad years, but only greater exactions to feed the hordes of soldiers and enrich the corrupt officials who followed them. By 1923 the condition of the countryside was deplorable, and a vast unrest was seething beneath the selfish and intolerable rule of the army. The rule of the warlords had alienated both scholars and peasants and thus was doomed.

Meanwhile new influences had come in to rejuvenate the moribund revolution. China's claims to her own territories had been pushed aside in favour of Japan at the Versailles Peace Conference. The Chinese Renaissance Movement, a most creative change in literary style and educational method, had swept through the universities. From all these forces, cultural, foreign and economic, was born the second, and much greater, explosion of the revolution. In 1921 the Chinese Communist Party was formed in Shanghai. Mao Tse-tung was one of the founder members. In the same year Dr Sun Yat-sen conferred with Joffe, the envoy of the USSR, and concluded with him an agreement for joint action between the Chinese Communist and Nationalist parties. The Kuomintang, Dr Sun's party, was at the same time reorganised on the lines of the Russian Communist Party, and Dr Sun, though declaring Communism unsuitable for China, renounced his earlier belief in parliamentary government in favour of a one-party state, which should keep the people in tutelage until they were politically mature.

Thus, still almost unremarked, and certainly not comprehended by the West, the Chinese Revolution as long ago as 1921 turned definitely away from the democratic ideals of Europe and America. The move in politics was obvious enough, had anyone then cared to study Chinese politics or thought Chinese affairs important; but in literature, which could not be easily read or known to the West, the movement was even more significant. The Russian envoys who came to Peking in the early twenties were ostracised by the diplomatic corps. They were entertained, even fêted, by the Chinese intellect-

uals. Russian literature became extremely popular and was freely translated in the following years. The governments of the militarists neither knew nor cared what the people thought, and exercised no censorship.

A few years after the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party and reorganisation on Russian lines of the Nationalist Party, the two revolutionary movements allied themselves to overthrow the government of the militarists. The Northern Expedition, as, starting from Canton, it was called, opened in the early summer of 1926 and by autumn all China south of the Yangtse had fallen to the revolutionary advance. Later in the year the great twin cities of Hankow and Wuchang on the River fell and were made the temporary capital of the new regime. The Communists and the Nationalists were still in close alliance. Moscow, indeed, was continually urging the Chinese Communists not to differ with or oppose the Nationalist policies. But the tension between the two wings was growing acute. As the revolutionary armies swept through the southern provinces the Communist rural organisers who went with them (one of whom was Mao Tse-tung) stirred up the discontent of the peasants and alarmed and alienated the landlords and their agents. When the army approached Shanghai, China's greatest industrial city, then mainly under foreign rule, the Chinese part of the city rose and seized factories and police stations, driving out the northern military. This movement, which was a brilliantly planned coup, effected in a night, was organised and led by Chou En-lai 周恩來, now Premier of China. At this moment the revolution was supported by both peasants and the educated and thus triumphed.

The Nationalist army was commanded by Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石, a relatively young officer, trained in Japan and Russia. He was, however, no friend of the Communists and already planned to rupture the alliance once the capture of Shanghai would give him the backing of the right-wing financial interest in that city. Soon after entering Shanghai he made a sudden attack on the worker corps, which had taken the town, and massacred them in large numbers. Chou En-lai escaped by a rare chance. Chiang then set up his own right-wing anti-Communist government in Nanking and denounced the government in Hankow, which was still in alliance with the Communists. Within a short time the two nationalist governments came to agreement and outlawed the Communist Party. Moscow, deceived to the last, was still urging the Chinese Communists to keep friends with the Nationalists, even when the latter were already arresting and shooting the Communist leaders.

The Communists, however, were not without support. Part of the Fourth Army, which had proved itself the most efficient of the revolutionary armies on the Northern Expedition, mutinied on August 1st, 1928, at Nanchang, capital of Kiangsi Province. The Commander of this force was Chu Teh 朱德, now Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese Army. One of his leading officers was Lin Piao 林彪, the general

Figure 4

Lin Piao (1907–1971), at the time Commander-in-Chief of the Communist forces in Manchuria, a photograph taken outside his residence in Harbin in 1946, shortly before the resumption of the Civil War in which he was to play a decisive role. Renowned for his brilliant military strategy, Lin, together with his family and close followers, was reportedly shot down on 11 September 1971 over Outer Mongolia as the result of a plot engineered by Mao [—LHM] (photograph courtesy of Lo Hui-min)



³ See Snow, *Red star over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946).

responsible for the final destruction of the Nationalist forces in 1949, and now commanding the Chinese expedition to Korea. Round the Red Army the fugitive Communists rallied, but at first, following the advice of Moscow as given to the Communist Party leader in China, the Red Army was very unsuccessful. The Russians, in true Marxist style, advised the Chinese Communists to seize large cities where there was a worker class who should be their supporters. The Chinese tried to seize such cities—Canton, Foochow, Changsha—and were heavily defeated. The workers in them were mostly old-fashioned craftsmen, unorganised, uninterested and afraid.

After failing to take or hold such cities the Red Army, very much reduced in size, was wandering about south China, hotly pursued by the forces of the Nationalist Government. At this time, the lowest ebb of the fortunes of the Chinese Communists, Mao Tse-tung 毛澤東 and Chu Teh joined forces on the mountain in Hunan which became their last refuge. No longer in touch with the Central Committee of the party and its Russian advisers, Chu and Mao

Figure 5

Li Li-san (1900–67), photographed standing on the frozen Sungari River 松花江 in late 1946 when he was in charge, among other things, of external relations in Communist Manchuria. Born in the year of the Boxer Uprising, this former head of the Chinese Communist Party was to die in gaol on 22 June 1967 at the height of the 'Cultural Revolution' [—IHM] (photograph courtesy of Lo Hui-min)



had to fend for themselves, and there devised the policy of land reform and support for peasant interests, which proved the foundation of the party's power in later years. This policy was criticised by the doctrinaire Marxists in Russia and the Treaty Ports. It was, of course a Chinese policy, based on Chinese revolutionary tradition, not Russian or Marxist. It is almost certain that Mao was for a time actually expelled from the party. He was certainly, by his own confession to Edgar Snow,³ deprived of his post on the Central Executive Committee. During the first years of the Chinese Soviet in Kiangsi and Hunan the Chinese Communist Party was in schism with Moscow. This fact every Communist is now at pains to cover up or explain away. It was not until it became obvious that not only was the heretical Chinese peasant policy of Mao Tse-tung a success, but that it was building a base for the Red Army which rendered the latter able to repel and defeat many anti-Communist extermination drives by Chiang Kai-shek. It was not till these facts were well known that Moscow saw the error of her ways, jettisoned her obedient instrument, the Chinese Communist leader Li Li-san 李立三, and recognised Mao as Chairman of the Party. Today Li Li-san's policy (albeit dictated by Moscow) is official dubbed the Li Li-san heresy in the works of Mao Tse-tung. The heretic, however, still occupies an important post in the regime. Mao's peasant policy had gained one pillar of support for the Communist Party, but the other, the backing of the educated class, had not been obtained.

However important the early history of the Chinese Communist Party may now seem, the obscure struggles of Mao and Chu in the Hunan mountains were little considered at the time. In the third decade of the Chinese Revolution it

was the personality of Chiang Kai-shek and the politics of his Nanking government which dominated the scene. Few Chinese, except ardent converts, then considered the Communist Party a serious competitor for power. Even when the Red Army for four years successfully repelled Chiang's extermination drives, people wondered at their skill and resolute defence, but never thought they were on the road to ultimate victory. The excesses which the Communists undoubtedly committed on landlords at this period, before the policy of New Democracy had been adopted, alienated educated opinion, even among those who disliked the Kuomintang. Thus in 1929 the Kuomintang had lost the peasants, but the Communists had not won the scholars.

The political history of this decade is the story of the failure of the liberal Nationalists to carry on the reforming movement of the Revolution, particularly in the country, and the rise of the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek. The generalissimo and his adherents evidently thought the Revolution had now entered the Napoleonic phase: the Shanghai massacres had been the Chinese 'whiff of grapeshot', and the Revolution had now turned respectable. Unfortunately Chiang was no Napoleon. Instead of being invariably victorious in battle, he was in these years constantly and signally defeated by the far smaller Red Army. Instead of rallying the nation in heroic and successful opposition to the foreign invader, he pursued a policy of yielding to Japanese pressure which cost the loss of Manchuria without resistance, the Japanese domination of North China, half-heartedly opposed, and the Japanese invasion at Shanghai in 1932, which the local troops gallantly resisted, without receiving any support from the Central Government. While the military record of the Kuomintang regime was inglorious, the political developments were steadily tending away from democratic or liberal ideals, and displayed an increasing tendency to imitate the methods and ideas of Italian Fascism. The regime was supposed to be preparing for constitutional government, but in fact the successive proposed draft constitutions were always more and more authoritarian, and such limitations as they allowed upon the power of the President were in practice never heeded by the actual head of the State. The decade from 1928 to 1937 was the period of the reaction.

In the years 1935-36 the Communist army, after suffering greatly from blockade in its southern stronghold, broke out in the famous Long March, an amazing feat, which took the whole Communist community across the breadth and length of China, by wild and inaccessible routes, until it occupied and established itself in the extreme north-west of the country. The reasons for this great march were not merely the pressure of the Nationalist blockade; the Communists already, like other Chinese, saw that war with Japan was inevitable if the country were not to be conquered piecemeal; they had already issued an empty and propagandist declaration of war on Japan, and the march to the north-west put them in a region where, when Japan invaded China, they would be on the flank of the invasion, and in a good position to exploit the opportunities which such conditions would create.

Another reason for their march and new policy of urging national unity in resistance to the Japanese was that Chiang's policy of 'internal pacification before resistance to external pressure', or hunting the Communists while yielding to the Japanese, was becoming extremely unpopular. By espousing the popular anti-Japanese attitude before the Kuomintang, and by forcing the latter to accede to this policy, the Communists in 1936-37 regained all their lost ground and were henceforth held in growing esteem by large sections of the public which had hitherto feared them. The Sian incident in early 1937, when Chiang was imprisoned by mutinous officers from Manchuria who wished to end the war with the Communists and fight the Japanese instead, gave the Communist Party its opportunity. Chou En-lai, Communist delegate to the mutinous army in Sian, saved Chiang's life that he might live to lead the Nationalist Party to a peaceful settlement of the internal war and a united front against Japan. Chiang, unwillingly submitting to this necessity, never acknowledged Chou's part, and later broke his word to his pardoned captor Chang Hsueh-liang, whom he has ever since held prisoner.

For the time there was a truce to the civil war, and before long the Japanese struck near Peking in July, 1937, and the open war began. What proved of real importance in that war, which endured till the Japanese surrender in 1945, was not the battles won or lost, but the slow change which war brought in the relative strength of the contending Chinese parties. The Japanese made many blunders: firstly, they alienated the peasants by the brutality and violence of their troops. They failed to occupy the rural areas effectively, but plunged far into the interior. This policy played into the hands of the Communists. The Japanese destroyed the cities, but left the countryside under such loose control that Communist guerrillas were quickly able to infiltrate and organise widespread resistance. As the Japanese pushed on west they constantly diminished the power of the Kuomintang, but actually increased the areas in which the Communist Party could operate and flourish. Resistance in the so-called occupied areas became Communist resistance. The Nationalist armies, driven to the remote west, became immobile, dispirited, underfed and poorly armed. They were unable to do more than passively hold the mountain barriers.

Behind these lines the Kuomintang decayed. Cut off from its one active and modern element, the city bourgeoisie of the ports, it fell under the control of the most reactionary landlord class in China, the Szechuan militarists, upon whom the government had now to rely. Inflation ruined the middle class, corruption increased to giant proportions, jealousy and fear of the Communist successes bred oppression and police rule. When the war ended there was a vast disillusionment among the Chinese under Nationalist rule. The country had been ravaged and ruined, wealth was gone, inflation rampant, corruption in official life worse than ever, liberalism persecuted, and, worst of all in its psychological effect, was the universal knowledge that this victory had not been won by Chinese arms, but by those of America and the other allies. There could be no pride in victory, nor real hope of peace.

Even before the Japanese surrender the threat of civil war hung over the country. During the latter part of the war the truce between Nationalists and Communists had virtually broken down. There was not much fighting between them, but Chiang blockaded the Communist area so that even medical drugs could not be sent by the International Red Cross to the Communist forces. At the surrender the Communists claimed the right to take over the cities in the regions they dominated. The Allied High Command, recognising only the Nationalist Government, refused this claim and flew in Kuomintang troops to occupy the northern cities. The Japanese were ordered to resist any Communist attempt to enter these cities first.

While thus taking a decisive step in support of the government of Chiang, the United States also sought to avert the civil war by sending General Marshall to mediate between the two parties and establish a coalition. At first, in 1946, it seemed as if he might have some chance of success. The military position was a stalemate. The Communists occupied all rural northern and eastern China, but though they cut the railways and roads, the Kuomintang occupied the cities and could communicate by air. The Kuomintang also occupied all western and southern China, apart from small guerrilla areas.

Educated public opinion was then still indifferent to either ideology but overwhelmingly against civil war. "We do not want Civil War" was the slogan of the liberal Press. The peasants were already won by the Communists, but the scholars were still neutral.

General Marshall failed; neither side would yield on vital matters. The Communists claimed a share in the government which would have made their policy dominant. This was wholly unacceptable to the right-wing Nationalists. Having issued a declaration condemning in equal terms the intransigence of both parties, General Marshall gave up his mission. But the United States continued to supply the Kuomintang with arms, munitions, aircraft and gasoline; training missions remained in Nanking and Formosa; thus while civil war became inevitable, the USA was actively helping one of the two sides which General Marshall had equally condemned.

Open civil war began in the spring of 1947. At first the confused picture of gains and retreats led many Chinese to hope that inability to reach a decision would force the combatants back to negotiation. Throughout this year the educated public, heartily sick of war, hoped for a military stalemate. As yet there was no real swing of scholar opinion towards the Communist Party, although the Kuomintang had become generally detested for their corruption, nepotism, oppression and inefficiency. The hope lay in a coalition which would bring in new men. But early in 1948 it began to be clear that the balance of success was swinging over to the Communist side. The Government's rapacity and its total inability to control inflation was fast alienating the last reserves of its public support.

The Kuomintang, openly relying on American aid, had offended much real nationalist opinion; it had become a naked military despotism oppressive to all social classes. The peasants were wholly won over to the Communist

cause; the educated, utterly despairing of peace by negotiation, only hoped for an end of the war: any end; no one now cared at all who won or what they would do with victory. Late in 1948 it was clear who was going to win. The Communist victories in of the autumn had been decisive. Manchuria was gone; north China, too; and the People's Liberation Army now stood victorious on the banks of the Yangtse opposite Nanking. The Mandate of Heaven had changed hands and the issue was settled. Forthwith the great mass of the Chinese people changed too; a landslide of support was displaced and came down on the Communist side. In China nothing succeeds like success, and nothing fails more fatally than moral failure. The Kuomintang were down, and as the Chinese proverb puts it, "everyone pushes a falling wall."

The decisive factor in this change was the attitude of the intellectuals, the scholars of older times. The old rule of revolution in China still proved true. The Kuomintang had begun with the backing of the scholars, but had quickly lost the support of the peasants by refusing to carry the revolution into the villages. The Communists had soon won the goodwill of the peasants, but for many years their alien creed and violence had denied them the support of the educated class. It was only when, in 1947–48, the Kuomintang had been proved incapable of reform and destructive to the national survival that the scholars gave their wholehearted allegiance to the opposition led by the Communist Party. From that moment the triumph of the revolution was assured.

Yet this revolution was not made by the Communists; it was the work of the peasants and the scholars, the combination which had been necessary to all great changes throughout Chinese history. In 1948 the Communists, by offering the land to the peasants and peace and good government to the intellectuals, were able to align this combination on their side. This result was not secured because the opposition was Communist, but rather in spite of that fact, but so long as the peasants and scholars obtain from the new regime satisfactions which were formerly denied to them, their allegiance to this government, Communist though it be, is assured. If in the future the pursuit of Communist ideological aims leads the new regime into courses which alienate the peasants or the scholars, then, and not till then, the regime will be in danger of internal opposition.

To men of Dr Morrison's generation the future course of the Chinese Revolution would have seemed incredible and repugnant; to his son Ian, who saw at first hand the final stages, it appeared rather as an inevitable explosion generated by forces which had long been gathering strength, and which no individual or group could hope to control. It is useless to argue whether a volcanic eruption is good or bad; it has to be accepted with all its violence and senseless destruction. After the eruption has subsided one may draw near across the hot and quaking earth to measure the changes in the landscape produced by so vast a convulsion.