

hai. The foreign powers, although "neutral," heavily favored the strongman Yuan Shi-kai, who could bring peace to the country. The compromise solution worked out by the negotiators was that Yuan would be made president if he could persuade the Manchu emperor to abdicate.

On December 25 Sun returned to China and was elected president by representatives of 17 revolutionary provinces (December 29). Sun agreed to concede the post to Yuan if Yuan joined the republican cause. On January 1, 1912, Sun took the presidential oath and declared the founding of the Republic of China. Li Yuan-hong was made vice-president, a cabinet was appointed, and the provisional government of the Republic of China came into existence. On January 22 Sun informed Yuan that as soon as the emperor abdicated and Yuan publicly declared support for the republic, Sun would resign in favor of Yuan. Having been convinced by Yuan that the future safety of the Manchus lay in their voluntary acceptance of the republic, the emperor abdicated on February 12. The abdication edict vested sovereignty in the people and gave Yuan Shi-kai full powers to organize a provisional republican government. Sun resigned on February 14 and, on the following day, Yuan was elected president unanimously by the representatives of the 17 provinces.

It was with surprising ease that the 2,000-year-old Confucian imperial structure was abolished, but the manner in which the transfer of power took place did not augur well for the future of either the revolutionaries or of the constitutionalists.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 5

# THE REPUBLIC THAT NEVER WAS: 1912-1927

## THE FAILURE OF THE REVOLUTION

The way the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists had joined hands in the final act of the revolution, the way the revolution was carried out, and the way Yuan Shi-kai ascended to the presidency meant several things, none of which boded well for the future of constitutionalism in China.

At the national level Sun Yat-sen's ideas of the revolutionary process and the stage-by-stage organization of the government had to be abandoned. Sun had envisioned a three-stage introduction of democracy. The first stage was to be a military unification of China, with the military exercising authority at all levels, from the center to the districts. After three years of this purely military government, the next stage (lasting six years) was expected to oversee the introduction of provisional constitutional government under military tutelage. At the end of nine years a full-fledged constitutional government was to be established, and the military government was to cease functioning. This plan could have been followed only if Sun Yat-sen and the Revolutionary Alliance had led the military insurrection and been in total command of the situation.

The revolution, as it had taken place, was, however, the combined product of reformist and revolutionary forces. The reforms produced social disequilibrium by creating new values and rising expectations among the politicized intellectuals and the new merchant class, which in turn put pressure on an inept leadership to concede even greater reforms, which were not forthcoming. This fostered a "revolutionary" ambience. The Revolutionary Alliance, exploiting the new values and the new nationalism, provided an alternative to the traditional monarchical system (a democratic republic), and by staging rebellions, added to social dysfunction. Both forces found common ground in constitutionalism, and growing anti-Manchu sentiment weakened the stand of those who favored a constitutional monarchy.

At the provincial level the provincial assemblies and local self-government had brought local leadership to the fore and bred provincialism; slogans such as "Guangdong for the Guangdongese" and "Sichuan for the Sichuanese" became popular. These tendencies were strengthened when the provinces declared themselves independent of the national government. The heightened autonomy of the provinces made it difficult to reimpose central authority, revolu-

tionary or otherwise, or to work out a national consensus.

### Yuan Shi-kai and the Constitution

Sun and the revolutionaries had offered the presidency to Yuan because they were aware of their military weakness. They also were afraid that an extended operation might invite foreign intervention and lead to the dreaded partitioning of China. But the revolutionaries also wanted to ensure that Yuan would serve the republic, so before yielding power to Yuan, they enacted a provisional constitution, which enshrined a bill of rights and provided for a cabinet form of government. The cabinet was to be approved by the senate (made up of representatives of all provinces, Mongolia, and Tibet) and be responsible to the parliament. The constitution was drawn up in haste because the revolutionaries had not envisioned the possibility of having to hand over power to a person like Yuan, who had dubious political credentials. When the issue of the constitution was debated, it was obvious that there was no unanimity among the revolutionary leaders. Indeed, as late as December 1911, Sun himself was in favor of an American-type presidential form of government, which would have placed all executive power in his hands as provisional president. However, once it was apparent that Yuan Shi-kai, and not Sun, would be the president, the framers of the provisional constitution hastily shifted to a British-type "responsible cabinet" system. As it turned out the provisional constitution was based on neither the American system nor on the British.

The president, under the provisional constitution, was in charge of political affairs; served as commander-in-chief of the army and navy; and had the authority to appoint ministers and diplomatic envoys, declare war, negotiate peace, and sign treaties. Although, he could take none of these actions without the approval of the senate, the provisional constitution, by giving the president these powers, had failed to make the premier the real executive head of state. Because of constitutional ambiguity, the premier not only had to share power with the president but the

division of power between the president and the premier was also not clear-cut.

The framers of the provisional constitution hoped that these anomalies would be sorted out when the parliament, to be convened within ten months, drew up the formal constitution. But that was not to be.

The first issue that arose between the revolutionaries and Yuan was the location of the capital. The Nanjing assembly, knowing that the strength of the revolutionaries lay in the south, voted for Nanjing to be the capital, but Yuan managed to manipulate the situation and get Beijing declared the capital of the republic. This act was backed by many Chinese as well as the foreign powers, who had their embassies in Beijing.

The second issue was that of sharing power with the cabinet. On assuming the presidency, Yuan appointed Tang Shao-yi (1860–1938) premier. Tang, who had been sent by the China Educational Mission to study in the United States in the 1870s and later risen to high official rank, was the chief negotiator between Yuan and the revolutionaries. He was eminently acceptable to both sides; he was a friend of Yuan and had won the confidence of Sun. He even joined the Revolutionary Alliance to allay any doubts about his loyalty to the republican cause.

Tang may have owed his appointment to Yuan, but once made premier, Tang tried to live up to the spirit of the constitution and refused to rubber-stamp Yuan's appointments and policies. The clashes between the two continued until Yuan proved by his arbitrary actions that he did not consider the premier to wield superior power. In June 1912 Tang resigned in frustration. He had been premier for less than three months. Historians have blamed Yuan for undermining the constitution, but the constitution itself was to blame for most of the confusion. Yuan had no control over the cabinet, and neither did the premier. The premier did not represent a majority party, and he had no control over the budget or the local governments. The legislature could impeach ministers, but the premier could not dissolve the legislature. Yuan could operate only by working around the

system, which had no roots in Chinese social consciousness or polity.

Since the Revolutionary Alliance members of the cabinet resigned along with Tang, Yuan gained an opportunity to appoint more pliable premiers and cabinet members. The legislative assembly, torn between factions and lacking a unified sense of constitutional powers, grudgingly approved the appointments.

The hope of the revolutionaries now lay in the parliamentary elections that were held in the winter of 1912–1913. The Revolutionary Alliance and four other political groups were reorganized as a political party, the *Guomindang* (the Nationalist party), which emerged as the majority party in the new parliament. The organizer of the Nationalist party and its de facto leader was Song Jiao-ren (1882–1913), who had carried on a vigorous election campaign in which he bitterly denounced Yuan's government and its policies. Song presumed that he would head the new, single-party cabinet and bring the constitution closer to the British model. Yuan, fearing a serious confrontation with Song and the parliament, solved the problem by having Song assassinated (March 20, 1913). Song's death marked the end of the democratic experiment.

Meanwhile, Yuan had expanded his control over the provinces through the appointment of loyal military governors. Incidentally, the idea that the provinces should be headed by military rather than civil governors came from the revolutionaries. They wrote this clause into the provisional constitution, no doubt as a concession to Sun's three-staged approach to democracy (the first stage being military unification).

However, Yuan could not exercise autocratic power without adequate finances. Having inherited the empty Qing coffers and the debts and indemnities of the Manchu government, he lacked funds. He knew that he could not obtain them from the provinces, which had become more autonomous and were diverting most of the provincial monies to local use. Besides, the needs of the state were far greater than could be fulfilled by rev-

enues from the provinces, even if these had been forthcoming. In April Yuan concluded a \$125 million "Reorganization Loan" from the five-power banking consortium (Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan) without gaining the approval of the parliament. The loan was secured against China's salt taxes, which were henceforth to be administered under foreign supervision.

The strongman Yuan, preserver of China's revolution and the Chinese Republic, had willingly allowed the foreigners to have greater control over China's finances. The news of this autocratic act was met with consternation by many constitutionalists and revolutionaries. The Guomindang opposition was further stirred by the findings of the committee inquiring into Song's death that the government had a hand in the assassination (published on the same day that Yuan signed the loan). On May 5 the parliament, led by the Guomindang, voted a resolution declaring the loan agreement illegal.

But Yuan, strengthened by the loan, no longer had any reason to tolerate Guomindang opposition. He severed relations with the Guomindang, dismissed three Nationalist military governors who had opposed the loans, and moved his troops south in anticipation of possible trouble. And trouble did come when Sun launched his "second revolution" in July and seven provinces (Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, Guangdong, Sichuan, Fujian, and Hunan), following the precedent of 1911, declared their independence of Beijing. Badly organized, badly planned, and lacking popular backing, this revolution collapsed within two months. Sun and other revolutionary leaders fled to Japan or sought sanctuary in the treaty ports. By September Yuan was militarily in control of the whole country.

Sun had failed to re-create the revolutionary spirit of 1911, proving that in 1911 it was the anti-Manchu sentiment and not the ideology of revolution that had united the students, gentry, merchants, and the military. In 1913 most social elements that had revolted against the Manchus no longer felt psychologically compelled to take up arms again.

They saw in Yuan a strongman who could unify and lead the country. More important, they were convinced that no one else could take his place. They lacked a deep commitment to the constitutional process, which they hardly understood, and they had little faith in the so-called political parties, which were open to bribes and whose factional bickering had destroyed their prestige.

After the second revolution Yuan did not need the parliament, except to legalize his position. He was technically still the provisional president, and only the duly elected parliament could formally elect the president of the republic for a tenure of five years. Parliament was supposed to enact a constitution before electing the president. But bribed or browbeaten by Yuan and pressured by the senior generals, members of parliament reversed the procedure and, on October 6, "elected" Yuan as the first President of the Republic. Foreign powers that had withheld recognition of the government now extended recognition to Yuan in time for his formal inauguration on October 10, 1913, the second anniversary of the revolution.

During the next year Yuan moved step by step to dismantle the constitutional structure. In early November he ordered the dissolution of the Guomindang and the arrest of its members still in Beijing on the grounds of security because the party had been involved in the summer rebellion. In January 1914 Yuan dissolved the parliament (which in any case now lacked a quorum), the provincial assemblies, and the local governments. Numerous newspapers were suppressed and "subversive" political associations banned. Yuan had taken China back to where the empress dowager had left it.

Working through the Political Council, a puppet body that Yuan had brought into existence in late 1913, the president created a constitutional council, which drafted a new constitution. The Constitutional Compact, as Yuan's constitution was called, was promulgated on May 1, 1914, and gave Yuan all the dictatorial powers the Manchus had sought for the emperor in 1910. The cabinet was replaced by a secretary of state, appointed by

and responsible to the president; the legislature, whenever it came into being, was to have only advisory powers. The difference between 1910 and 1914 was that a weak Manchu court, which was giving in to public pressure for the advancement of the constitutional cause, had been replaced by a strong dictator, who could (and did) reverse the constitutional process. Yuan used bribery, espionage, and political assassination to run his government.

In December 1914 Yuan, by an amendment to the Constitutional Compact, had his term extended indefinitely and obtained the right to appoint his successor. He then did something even more shocking, something totally unexpected from a republican president: He carried out the imposing ceremony of offering sacrifice to Tian at the Temple of Heaven, a ceremony that could be carried out only by an emperor. Yuan also revived the sacrificial rites to Confucius that had been suspended since 1911 and got the Political Council to endorse their restoration officially. To a discerning eye it would have been obvious that Yuan not only was out to destroy republicanism but also had monarchical ambitions.

#### *Yuan and Imperialism*

The aim of the revolution had been to establish a strong national government that could counter imperialist encroachment, but without a secure financial base no Chinese government, Manchu or Republican, could be forceful. One of the last acts of the Manchu government had been to allow the foreign commissioners of the Maritime Customs Service to collect customs revenues directly and forward them, not to Beijing, but to the International Commission of Bankers at Shanghai for distribution among the creditor nations (November 1911). As noted earlier, Yuan could not have survived without the reorganization loan. But to secure it he had to weaken China's sovereignty even further by allowing foreign control over the restructured Salt Revenue Administration.

Moreover, to gain the loan Yuan had to recognize Britain's interest in Tibet and Rus-

sia's in Outer Mongolia. Afraid that the economic independence and political autonomy of Outer Mongolia would be destroyed by the influx of Han Chinese, as had happened in Inner Mongolia, the Living Buddha at Urga (a Tibetan by birth), backed by Moscow, declared Outer Mongolia independent on December 28, 1911. The Russians, not wanting to arouse Japanese fears or draw the attention of other powers to this area, worked out a formula with Yuan whereby Outer Mongolia was recognized as "autonomous" under China's "suzerainty." Outer Mongolia in fact became a Russian protectorate.

The British government in India, afraid of the expansion of Russian influence in Tibet, began to view Tibet as an area of legitimate British interest and a possible buffer state between British India and Russian Central Asia. In 1904 the British sent an armed expedition to Lhasa, the "forbidden city," and signed an Anglo-Tibetan convention that might have made Tibet a British protectorate had their anxiety regarding Russia not been allayed soon thereafter. The Chinese reasserted their authority over Tibet briefly in 1910 but lost it again in 1912. In 1913 the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and secular head of Tibet, declared independence. Britain recognized Tibet's independence in 1914, and although China refused to do so, Yuan had no power to stop Britain from developing direct relations with Lhasa.

In the nineteenth century, mutual jealousies among the imperialists had kept any single power from trying to turn China into a protectorate or from carving out a colony in China proper; when the world entered the twentieth century, the Western powers no longer had even a desire to proceed along those lines. The Japanese, however, viewed China in a different light and once the Western nations became involved with World War I (1914-1918), Japan saw it as an opportunity to expand its influence in China. The Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 did not legally bind Japan to any action against Germany, and the war in no way adversely affected Japan's territorial or other interests in the Pacific or China. But Japan, paying no heed to the Chi-

nese proclamation of neutrality, proceeded to attack the Germans in Qingdao. The Chinese tried to limit the area of Japanese action by declaring a "war zone," but Japan contemptuously disregarded the attempt. After the fall of Qingdao (November 1914), Japan took over the German leased territory in Shandong as well as all other rights and interests the Germans had secured in that province.

When hostilities between the Japanese and the Germans had ceased with the collapse of German resistance, Yuan informed the Japanese (January 7, 1915) that China's neutrality would once again extend over Shandong, except for the leased territory. The Japanese protested that this was an unfriendly act and on January 18 presented Yuan with their own demands, the nefarious Twenty-One Demands. The demands were divided into five groups: Group I transferred German rights in Shandong to Japan and made it exclusively a Japanese sphere of interest. Group II confirmed Japan's paramount position in eastern Inner Mongolia and South Manchuria; extended leases for a period of 99 years; gave the Japanese subjects rights to lease or own land for trade, manufacturing, or farming; and ensured that no third power would be granted any privileges without Japanese consent. Group III gave Japan the right to become the joint operator of the Han-ye-ping Iron and Steel Works in Hubei and denied China the right to open mines in the neighborhood of those owned by the Han-ye-ping Company without Japanese permission. Group IV demanded a promise from China not to cede or lease any harbor, bay, or island along the coast of China to any third power.

Group V contained the most vicious demands of all. If accepted, these would have made China a protectorate of Japan. Under the Group V demands the Chinese central government was to employ Japanese advisors in political, financial, and military affairs; "numerous Japanese" were to be employed to administer jointly the police departments of major cities; Japanese were to administer jointly Chinese arsenals and provide the bulk

of China's military needs; Japan was to be consulted first for China's foreign capital needs; and Japanese missionaries were to have the right to propagate Buddhism in China.

These demands were presented directly to Yuan, and he was admonished to keep them secret. However, Yuan was an astute politician and he allowed certain details to be leaked to the national and foreign press, thus creating a strong anti-Japanese sentiment within China and a suspicion of Japanese intentions in Britain and the United States. After four months of parleys in which China tried its best to wear down the Japanese negotiators, Japan presented an ultimatum (May 7, a day which came to be marked annually as National Humiliation Day) saying that if matters were not settled by a certain date, force might be used. Yuan then accepted most of the demands, with the proviso that group V should be further negotiated. In face of the widespread hostility that the demands had created, Japan agreed to the compromise. The Sino-Japanese treaties were signed on May 25, 1915.

The unity that the nation had shown in anti-Japanese demonstrations, boycotts, and riots gave Yuan the impression that the country was wholly behind him. He was soon to learn the shocking truth that this was not so.

#### **Yuan Restores the Monarchy**

The Constitutional Compact already had given Yuan all the power that he could ever have hoped for, but he still chose to dismantle the republican system altogether and to establish a constitutional monarchy. Chinese historians and most foreign scholars have long denounced Yuan as a three-time traitor who betrayed the Guang-xu emperor in 1898, the Manchu dynasty in 1911, and the republic in 1916. Without denying Yuan's talent for intrigue and deception, it can be argued that Yuan was a product of unique circumstances, not a maker of them. After all, it was the monarchists and the revolutionaries who had both beseeched him to head the government, and not the other way around.

Yuan, more than anyone else, realized the bankruptcy of the republican movement, which had resulted in strengthening provincialism rather than in helping to reintegrate the Chinese political system. Yuan's control over the country was superficially maintained through the loyalty of his generals, but even this loyalty was not absolute, as events were soon to prove.

The debate over China's future constitution was far from over. The Manchus had abdicated, but those who had struggled for a constitutional monarchy were still influential and were not yet convinced that a republican form of government would work. To aid in formulating his policies, Yuan engaged Chinese and foreign consultants to advise him on constitutional and government matters. Buttressed by the advice of these specialists, particularly that of the American political scientist Frank J. Goodnow (professor of Columbia University and later president of Johns Hopkins University), Yuan came to the conclusion that national integration could only be ensured through a monarchical system. Goodnow wrote,

It is of course not susceptible of doubt that a monarchy is better suited than a republic to China. China's history and traditions, her social and economic conditions, her relations with foreign powers all make it probable that the country would develop that constitutional government, which it must develop if it is to preserve its independence as a state, more easily as a monarchy than as a republic.<sup>1</sup>

Goodnow had qualified his statement with the condition that the restoration of monarchy must meet public approval. Yuan set about to gain it by having six well-known personalities, including Yan Fu (who later said that he had been coerced into joining), organize a "society for planning peace" to study whether monarchism or republicanism was more suited to China and start a nationwide campaign to poll public opinion. The government was soon flooded with petitions asking for a monarchical system. Representa-

tives of the provinces, whose members had been handpicked by provincial governors to form the so-called National People's Assembly, were polled. They made a unanimous declaration (November 20):

Reverently representing the public opinion of the nation, we request that the president, Yuan Shih-k'ai, be made emperor of the Chinese empire. He will have the highest and the most complete authority and sovereignty over the nation. The throne will be handed down in his royal family from generation to generation through ten thousand generations.<sup>2</sup>

On December 11 the Political Council petitioned Yuan to ascend the Dragon Throne. It is possible that Yuan was not fully aware of how his loyal henchmen had arranged the puppet show, but he was pleased to begin preparations to ascend the Dragon Throne, which he did by creating five ranks of nobility, choosing the reign title of Hong-xian (Grand Constitutional Era, to begin on January 1, 1916), and minting coins bearing his image.

These developments did not disturb the mass of common people, the peasantry, few of whom had any idea what was happening in Beijing. But Yuan and his close advisors had underestimated the resentment and opposition that had been growing in the gagged, silent majority of the educated urban classes. Sun, who in exile had established a new revolutionary party, was of course vociferously against the monarchical move; Liang Qi-chao, head of the Progressive party, which had initially supported the president, bitterly attacked Yuan; Japan and the other foreign powers registered their objections; most ironically, even Yuan's own generals, who had accepted his dissolution of the parliament and the elimination of political parties, turned against him.

The military governor of Yunnan, Cai E, incited by his one-time mentor, Liang Qi-chao, revolted against Beijing, denounced Yuan, and declared Yunnan's independence on December 25. Guizhou followed suit in

January 1916, and Guangxi in March. Realizing that he could not militarily suppress the rebellion and facing a national outpouring of criticism, Yuan restored republican government on March 22.

But Cai E and Liang demanded that Yuan resign his post and leave China. Since imperial restoration threatened provincial autonomy in a way that suppressing parliament and Guomindang had not, they found backing in provinces that seceded from the center in April and May: Guangdong, Zhejiang, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Hunan. Yuan's top Beiyang generals, Duan Qi-rui and Feng Guo-zhang, now played a key role in undermining Yuan's position by joining the banned Guomindang parliamentarians and other leaders of the opposition and demanding Yuan's retirement.

One wonders what would have happened next if Yuan had not died on June 6, 1916.

#### **WARLORD POLITICS AND THE MAKING OF A NEW CHINA: 1916-1927**

The revolutionaries had been optimistic that after the abolition of the Confucian monarchy, a rapid national integration would take place under a democratic, constitutional republican government. This optimism was totally baseless because China was wholly unprepared for representative democracy. The ideal of democracy is not easy to achieve and requires a foundation that few countries outside Western Europe and North America have been able to develop. China, with its authority-dependency orientation, its lack of an ideal of rule by law or the concept of individual rights, and its lack of a tradition of loyal opposition, had few of the ingredients that would have been conducive to the transplant of liberal democratic institutions.

Yuan, the "elected" monarch, tried to rebuild the Chinese polity by combining the traditional ingrained attitudes of the masses toward monarchy with the modern notion of a "social contract" as reflected in the constitu-



tional movement. But lacking both the traditional sanction for authority that came with the mandate of heaven and the modern sanction that came with the people's will, he had to rely on military force.

The events of 1915–1916 led to three parallel developments.

- First, provincial military power holders, by proving the impotence of Beijing, further undermined the efforts to centralize power and strengthened the forces of regionalism. For almost the whole of the next decade, although the fiction of a central government was maintained (primarily because the foreign powers continued to deal with the militarist in control of Beijing as if he represented the government of China), provincial militarists (the warlords) made alliances and counteralliances to expand their territorial domains and take over Beijing. Warlords would often declare their independence to destabilize the government at Beijing or, as became the case in south China, disassociate themselves from Beijing altogether.
- Second, the Japanese emerged as the key imperialist nation, with ambitions to make China subservient to Tokyo.
- Third, Yuan's monarchical movement, the Japanese Twenty-one Demands, and the rise of warlords heightened the sense of urgency among the nationalistic and patriotic intelligentsia in finding a new solution to China's ills.

### Warlord Politics

Yuan Shi-kai was succeeded by Li Yuan-hong, who had been vice-president under Yuan. Li revived the 1912 constitution, recalled the members of the old National Assembly, and reconstituted the cabinet with Duan Qi-rui (1865–1936) as premier. If it was Li's desire to return the country to the situation that had existed in 1913, on the eve of the dissolution of the National Assembly, he succeeded beyond any doubt.

However, like Yuan, Li was soon at odds with his premier, and the members of the National Assembly, representing the old Guomindang and the Progressive Party, were sharply divided over every possible issue.

Working under the old constitution, which weighted the premier over the president, Duan tried to make himself the center of executive authority, although he depended more on his comrades-in-arms, the Beiyang military governors (who had established practically independent governments over the provinces they dominated), than on the National Assembly.

The issue that brought matters to a head was World War I. It was rumored, correctly, that Premier Duan, pressured by the Japanese from whom he had received secret loans, was pushing the country to join the Allies in the war against Germany. Tokyo's calculation was that, by getting China to take this decision, Japan would automatically take over the German (the enemy's) interests in northern China.

President Li, backed by the parliament, dismissed Duan in May 1917, but Duan got the Beiyang militarists to rally to his side. Eight provinces, including the Metropolitan province of Zhili, declared their independence of the center and condemned the president and the National Assembly for Duan's dismissal. This was a strange way to work the constitution! However, one surprising element of continuity in this otherwise convoluted story of the naked use of military force to gain political power was the continued maintenance of a constitutional facade. A parliament, however tattered, was used to legitimize the presidents and premiers who represented warlord cliques that, alone, held real power. Even more surprisingly, the "puppet" parliaments often proved themselves to be less than docile.

In desperation Li accepted the offer of Zhang Xun, the "pigtailed" general (because he and his troops had retained their queues as a sign of loyalty to the Manchus) to intercede. Zhang was a Beiyang general and military governor of Anhui but had not proclaimed his independence.

Zhang, however, had some plans of his own. After he got Li to suspend the meddlesome National Assembly (June 12, 1917), he moved into Beijing at the head of his troops to effect the restoration of the Manchu

dynasty (July 1). The imperial edict proclaiming the return of Emperor Puyi (b. 1906; reigned 1908–1911; after abdication he was allowed to stay on in the Forbidden City) was drafted by the one-time hero of the reformists, Kang You-wei. But the country that had just denied Yuan the throne was in no mood to accept the return of the Manchus. The Beiyang generals retracted their declarations of independence and prepared to attack Beijing. Duan headed the antirestoration army.

Li, who had taken refuge in the Japanese legation, reappointed Duan as premier. On July 14 Duan entered Beijing as the savior of the republic. There was very little fighting, Zhang Xun retired from politics, and the young emperor disappeared from view without any further fuss. Duan consolidated his position by forcing Li Yuan-hong to retire in favor of the vice-president, the Beiyang General Feng Guo-zhang.

Once again the southwestern provinces expressed opposition, and Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan declared their independence. Sun Yat-sen, now back in Shanghai, launched a Constitution Protection Movement, and joined by the minister of navy (who had resigned in protest and taken the navy with him), sailed south to establish a rival military government in Guangzhou (August 1917). Interestingly, Sun took on the military rank of generalissimo. The Guomindang-dominated parliament also moved to Guangzhou.

From 1917 to 1927 two governments were vying for national recognition—one in the south at Guangzhou, the other in the north at Beijing. Neither of them had jurisdiction over extensive territories, nor did they control national organizations or exercise national authority. And both were challenged by several regional rival warlord governments that periodically replaced them. There were many scores of major and minor warlords, whose activities would be fundamental to understanding the history of the autonomous or semiautonomous provinces. They, however, remained marginal to the politics of Beijing and Guangzhou and so have to be

ignored in a broad overview of the warlord decade.

The warlords came from diverse backgrounds. Some were illiterate, some highly educated, some traditional, some Westernized, some rose from the ranks, some had seen service as high officials in the Imperial Army, some came from impoverished families (a few had been bandits), and some were from well-established and affluent families.

Some warlords were interested in developing and modernizing their areas, but most had little consideration for public welfare and exploited the countryside to the maximum for finances and recruits for their ever-growing armies. A warlord would issue paper money, which often lost even the limited value it had to begin with when another warlord took over the territory. The parasitic armies increased from 500,000 in 1914 to 900,000 in 1920 to 1.5 million in 1925.

As far as national finances are concerned, the provinces stopped contributing to the central exchequer after 1919. Beijing depended on the surplus funds released to the central government from the salt and maritime customs revenues after the foreign debts had been serviced. In 1919 these receipts amounted to \$7 million, and the expenditures to \$10 million. The deficit was made up by borrowing from native banks. As expenditures increased, militarists like Duan Qi-rui took secret and open loans from foreign powers, pledging whatever remained unpledged. In 1922 China defaulted on its foreign loans for the first time, and in 1923 it was calculated that government expenditure was 17 times its income. Chaotic politics and national bankruptcy went hand in hand.

Warlord politics during the decade 1917–1927 is so tangled and confusing that it is impossible to delineate it in a brief overview. We will first look at the affairs in the north, centered around Beijing which was considered to be the capital of republican China.

**The North.** As a broad generalization it can be said that in the north, the Beiyang commanders split into two warring cliques, both

contending to gain power over the government in Beijing and thereby tap the foreign loan market: the Anfu clique under Duan Qi-rui and the Zhili clique under Feng Guozhang. When they felt threatened or saw an opportunity to improve their situation, other warlords not belonging to these cliques joined one side or the other or took independent action.

As noted above, Duan came back to power as premier after the mid-1917 Zhang Xun coup. Duan, who had been receiving loans from Japan and was being pressured by Tokyo to join the Allies and declare war on Germany, did so on August 14, 1917. At the same time, Duan negotiated another loan from Japan.

However, Duan found himself heckled by the parliament for his arbitrary action. As President Yuan Shih-kai had done before him, Premier Duan freed himself by abrogating the provisional constitution, revising the Organic Law of the parliament, reducing the electorate still further, and creating a new National Assembly packed by his followers.

In October 1918 the Anfu-controlled parliament replaced President Feng, of the Zhili clique, with one of Duan's lieutenants. Feng, as may be recalled, was vice-president under Li Yuan-hong and when Duan overthrew Li, Duan had found it expedient to promote Feng to the post of president. Now there was no need to perpetuate the farce. The dismissal of Feng, however, resulted in the Zhili group starting a campaign maligning Duan for being a traitor who, in return for bribes, was "selling out China" to the Japanese. That the criticism was not untrue became apparent in 1919, when the Versailles Conference decided that Japan could retain the German claims in Shandong and Duan's cabinet appeared to have condoned the decision.

The news from Paris, which reached Beijing on May 1, infuriated Beijing students who began massive demonstrations against Japan and demanded that China not sign the peace treaty. The May Fourth Incident, named after the student demonstrations on that date, led to a countrywide nationalistic

upsurge, and Duan was forced to dismiss some high-ranking officials. (The incident is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.) The Versailles treaty was not signed by China.

While Duan was trying to restabilize his position, Wu Pei-fu (a warlord with a base in Sichuan and western Henan), the new head of an enlarged Zhili clique (enlarged by the addition of some other militarists) attacked Duan. Wu had also managed to get the bandit-turned-warlord Zhang Zuo-lin (based in Manchuria) to join the fray. In June 1920 the Anfu forces melted away before the advancing armies, Duan went into retirement, and Wu's Zhili clique, supported by Zhang Zuo-lin, seized power. Although Zhang would not accept Wu's leadership, this unstable coalition lasted through 1921. But the break between Zhang and Wu came into the open in 1922, and Wu, having engineered an alliance with Feng Yu-xiang, the Shaanxi-based independent warlord (often referred to as the Christian general because he had converted to Christianity), forced Zhang to withdraw beyond the Great Wall to his territorial base in Manchuria.

Wu Pei-fu then recalled the supposedly innocuous Li Yuan-hong to take over the presidency. The Zhili clique, posing as protector of the republic, convened the "legitimate" parliament (August 1922), which had been dissolved in 1917 by Zhang Xun, and hoped that the presence of Li and the recall of the parliament would help in winning back the south. There was a flurry of meetings, and talk spread of adopting a federal system of government, which would give autonomy to the provinces but have only one national government. These discussions were academic, however, and before anything could be worked out, Cao Kun, a Zhili warlord, took over the leadership of the Zhili faction, ousted President Li, and got himself elected president by heavily bribing the members of parliament (1923). Wu Pei-fu, still the head of the Zhili forces, retired to his home base.

In 1924 the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuo-lin tried to reenter Beijing politics by joining a local war against Wu Pei-fu. In

autumn 1924, after Zhili had declared war against Zhang, Wu marched his troops northeast to invade Manchuria through the Shanhaiguan pass, where the Great Wall meets the ocean. Parallel to this move, Wu ordered the Christian general Feng Yu-xiang to move to the western passes so that Zhang could not make an encircling movement and attack Wu from behind. Instead of following Wu's orders, Feng double-crossed him. Feng turned back from the Great Wall, seized Beijing, imprisoned Cao Kun, and ordered the arrest of the members of parliament.

The affairs of China were further complicated by the support the major warlords received from foreign powers. Zhang was aided by the Japanese, who wanted to build up their position in Manchuria; Wu was supported by the British, who had interests in the Yangtze valley; Feng was given some aid by the Soviet Union, which was also now backing Sun Yat-sen in the south.

*The South.* The situation in the south was no different from that in the north. As mentioned earlier, in 1917 Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen tried to establish himself at the head of a republican government in Guangzhou. But without an army of his own, Sun's authority depended on the goodwill of the Guangdong and Guangxi warlords. In 1918 the unsympathetic Guangxi clique came to dominate Guangzhou, abolished the "generalissimo-ship," and forced Sun to retire to Shanghai. Sun used his time to ponder the nature of politics and write a book expounding his political ideas.

In October 1920 Chen Jiong-ming, the Guangdong warlord, a member of the Guomindang and a follower of Sun, expelled the Guangxi militarists and invited Sun to return as head of the new military government. In May 1921 Sun, having got himself elected president by the southern rump parliament, declared his intention to launch a northern expedition to unify China. But Chen had no desire to involve his armies in a war with the powerful northern warlords. Besides, he favored the much-touted federal system that would give him an opportunity to entrench

himself in Guangdong. So Chen, while assuring the Zhili clique that he had no intention to start any military action, turned against Sun, forcing him to retire once again to Shanghai (August 1922).

In 1923 Sun, having accepted the Soviet offer of arms and financial aid, at last managed to consolidate his hold over the military government at Guangzhou. Rather naively, Sun still hoped that China's affairs could be settled constitutionally, and therefore he entered into talks with the enemies of Cao Kun because Cao had "usurped" the presidency. When the anti-Cao generals took power, Sun decided to go to Beijing to discuss the formation of a national government on lines satisfactory to his vision of a unified China (December 31, 1924). He died in Beijing in March 1925, without having achieved any results. Backed by Zhang Zuo-lin, the old fox Duan Qi-rui had been installed Chief Executive (the office of presidency was dropped) without regard to any constitution.

*The End of the Warlord Era.* In 1926, in the face of the growing threat from Sun's reconstituted and newly armed Nationalist party (Guomindang), which under its new military leader, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jie-shi), had launched its northern expedition to unify China militarily, Zhang reunited with the forces of Wu Pei-fu. Feng was ousted from Beijing, and there was no further use for Duan, who once again retired from active politics. However, Zhang and Wu failed to agree on the formation of a civil government, and for a year no president was appointed. In 1927 Zhang assumed control as military dictator but in the following year was compelled to retreat to Manchuria when the Nationalist forces swept north and brought China proper under their domination. By the end of 1928 the Nationalist government had occupied Beijing, established its capital at Nanjing, and gained the recognition of foreign powers.

Ultimately, the south won over the north, but it was a totally new combination of forces that succeeded in the military unification of China. In 1923-1924 Sun Yat-sen, helped by the Soviet Union, reorganized the

Nationalist party along lines of the Russian Communist party, added a Bolshevik-style party army to the organization, and agreed to cooperate with the newly established Communist party of China (which was also, naturally, being helped by the Soviet Union). After Sun's death, it was this new Guomindang that fulfilled Sun's goal and brought about the Nationalist revolution.

Since developments from this stage on were intricately connected with the weakening of traditional social attitudes, the rise of Chinese nationalism, the emergence of socialism and leftist ideas, it is necessary to shift attention to the larger social and intellectual scene.

### NEW CULTURE, NATIONALISM, AND NEW POLITICAL IDEALS

Surprising as it may seem, political turmoil connected with the warlords did not produce a corresponding chaos in the modern economic sector of China or in its urban social life. Warlordism unquestionably had a negative impact on rural China, and it made little contribution to the progress of the modern industrial sector of the economy, but it could not thwart the trend toward the growth of urbanization, particularly the growth of treaty ports. Trade and industries continued to expand, schools and colleges continued to grow in numbers, and magazines and newspapers proliferated.

#### *Trade and Industry*

China's foreign trade rose 350 percent in the first three decades of the twentieth century. But what is even more important, the nature of the trade changed significantly. The import of opium, which had first turned the balance of trade against China, was phased out by 1917. (This, of course, did not mean that the Chinese had also stopped producing opium within the country.) China now increasingly imported commodities like raw cotton, machinery, kerosene, paper, telephone and telegraph supplies, and scientific

instruments, which reflected the trend toward industrialization and modernization.

Similarly, changes in the export trade showed that China was in the intermediary stage between a traditional economy and a modern one. The traditional items of Chinese export, produced by traditional methods, had lost out to countries that had begun to produce these items by using modern techniques and paying careful regard to standards and standardization. The export of tea, which had represented nearly 50 percent of the export trade in 1880, declined to about 5 percent in the 1920s. Silk also suffered a decline, although relatively less than that of tea. In the 1920s China was exporting goods such as soya beans, bean cakes, vegetable oils, pig bristles, hides, and skins—products of cheap labor.

Modern industry also made considerable advances. By 1914 China was extracting nearly 13 million tons of coal and 0.5 million tons of iron ore, and it had modern mills producing iron, textiles, cotton yarn, cigarettes, electric power, and cement. Despite warlord disruptions, the average annual rate of industrial growth from 1912 to 1929 was 13.8 percent. Although the foreign capitalists had led the way in industrial development, native capitalists gradually increased their role. World War I gave the Chinese capitalists an excellent opportunity to expand their enterprises; the Western powers, diverted by the war in Europe, had not only loosened their grip in China but also needed to import processed goods, which their own factories were no longer in a position to produce. Between 1914 and 1918 Chinese mills increased from 75 to over 110, the most noteworthy expansion taking place in the textile industry. By 1933, 67 percent of the industrial gross output value was produced in Chinese factories, which employed 73 percent of the labor force.

In the context of China as a whole, however, the industrial sector of the economy was minuscule. For example, handicraft production accounted for 95 percent of the cloth consumed in 1919. However, the few centers (such as Shanghai, Wuhan, Tianjin,

Qingdao, Guangzhou, and Mukden) in which industries were established became the nuclei of future industrial growth and the training ground for the new class of industrial workers.

By 1921, when China had about a million industrial workers, Western-style permanent labor organizations had already come into existence. The establishment, in that year, of the Communist Party of China and the concurrent reorganization of the Nationalist Party on Communist Russian lines politicized labor unions and encouraged their expansion. Strikes for economic gains and political strikes became common. One newspaper calculated that in the last quarter of 1922 there were 41 strikes. Approximately 71 percent of these were for increases in wages, 12 percent opposed the supervisors, 12 percent were sympathetic, and 5 percent were for the right to organize unions.

However, in the absence of effective labor regulations, strikes could not make a significant change in the overall labor conditions, which remained poor for a long time. Low wages, unhygienic living and working quarters, long work hours—even for women and children—and contract labor provided by unethical and criminal organizations were the rule rather than the exception.

#### *Intellectual Life*

The failure of the 1911 revolution, the two attempts to revive the monarchy, and the drift of China into warlordism led many revolutionary intellectuals to turn their backs on politics in disgust and frustration. It was clear that paper drafts of constitutions were unlikely to change the nature of politics. Only a revolutionized society could do that.

The need to forge a new society had been recognized by Liang Qi-chao even before the Qing dynasty had fallen, and a debate on what ingredients should go into the making of "new culture" had been carried on by the Chinese students studying in Japan. After 1911 most revolutionaries became involved with the affairs of the state, and there was a short pause in the debate, which

was reignited in 1915, the year of the Twenty-one Demands and Yuan's monarchical movement. It is no coincidence that in 1915 Chen Du-xiu (1879-1942) founded the magazine *New Youth*, which began an all-out attack on Chinese tradition and soon became the most influential magazine in China.

The May Fourth Era, as the period 1915-1923 came to be known, brought to a logical conclusion the intellectual trends that had begun, three-quarters of a century earlier with Lin Ze-xu's and Xu Ji-yu's recommendations for change that would strengthen China. As the imperialist threat to China's sovereignty and integrity increased and the Qing dynasty failed to meet the challenge, Chinese intellectuals' perceptions of the national problems changed. By the end of the nineteenth century the realization had dawned that it was not the traditional Confucian culture and its adjunct, the traditional political system, that needed saving but the entity called "the Chinese state." The Western concept of a nation-state was new, but once Western learning brought it home, nationalism made its first appearance and intellectuals began to seek the sources of national power, even if it implied a rejection of tradition.

Liang Qi-chao and Kang You-wei, still closely tied to tradition, had tried to change the nature of Confucianism to make Western learning acceptable. The post-1900 generation of Chinese intellectuals, products of the new school system and foreign education, far more nationalistic and anti-imperialist than Kang and Liang and far less bound to tradition, felt that only Westernization and the discarding of tradition could save China. By 1921 there were 10 university-level institutions of higher learning, 41 provincial collegiate schools, 189 provincial normal schools, and thousands of junior and elementary schools, all geared to Western learning in one form or another. By 1930 there were about 130,000 schools, ranging from the primary to the university level, with an enrollment of approximately 4.25 million students. The two most prestigious universities were Beijing

National University and Qing Hua University, both in Beijing.

The question this generation faced was not how to introduce Western ideologies but what Western ideology would be most suitable for the country. Most thinkers were in favor of a parliamentary democracy. A few had dabbled with bomb-throwing anarchism before 1911, and anarchism continued to attract youthful minds, but in the larger context, this ideology had few followers. Since China was not an advanced industrial country and, therefore, lacked the presumed prerequisite for a Marxian revolution, Marxism had attracted little interest. A strain of socialism, however, was visible in both Liang Qi-chao's writings and the ideology professed by Sun Yat-sen. It was neither well defined nor did it form the main plank of their thinking, but Sun and Liang, although they were not "good" socialists . . . did much to make socialism 'good' for China. They pioneered in giving it respectability, and the vital connection with the themes of 'nationalism' and 'democracy' which it needed."<sup>3</sup>

Parliamentary democracy, however, remained the main goal of most intellectuals. The failure of the republic did not turn them against representative government, but instead it led them to probe the deeper causes of that failure. Chen Du-xiu's analysis, expressed in his forceful articles in the *New Youth* magazine, was that Confucian social culture lay at the heart of China's troubles and that the absence of a tradition of democracy and science had made it difficult to make the republic work. Confucian culture was predisposed to despotism, demanding servility and abjuring individual independence. It was narrowly elitist, exploiting the many to serve the few. Inherently conservative and isolationist, it put hurdles in the path of progress, cosmopolitanism, and the scientific outlook. This "old and rotten" culture, as Chen put it, had to be destroyed in toto, so that youth could be liberated from the bondage of the tyrannical Confucian family system and the energies of the nation released for creative growth and development.

In 1917 Chen Du-xiu, now recognized as the champion of China's new culture movement, was invited to serve as dean of the College of Letters in Beijing University. Here he and his magazine became the centers of the intellectual ferment that made Beijing University the vanguard educational institution in China. One of the young intellectuals who contributed articles to *New Youth* was Hu Shi (1891–1962; Hu Shi received his doctorate from Columbia University and was later appointed professor of philosophy at Beijing University). In 1917, Hu Shi was only 26 years old when he published the first of a series of articles that were to radically change the Chinese literary and educational scene. In these articles Hu Shi made the revolutionary proposal that the hallowed classical written language (*wen-yan*) be replaced with the vernacular (*bai-hua*) because *wen-yan* was the language of Confucian high culture, was difficult to master, and had resulted in scholarly elitism. Besides, *wen-yan*, however elegant and sophisticated, was a dead language. It could not be spoken and served only as a medium of written expression. By adopting *bai-hua*, the written and spoken languages could be made to conform and the problem of education and mass literacy be simplified; *bai-hua* would thus help in bringing modern ideas to larger numbers. Hu Shi also proposed that *bai-hua* be used to create a new popular literature based on Western forms (short stories, plays, novels, and poetry)—a literature that would deal with the life of the common people and expose the evils of traditional ways. Hu Shi advised the writers to discard clichés and classical allusions and to stop imitating classical writing and artificiality. All writing, he said, should have meaning and substance.

Ironically, the debate on the literary revolution was carried on in *wen-yan*! It was only from 1918 that *New Youth* was published entirely in *bai-hua*, and it was also in that year that the magazine carried Lu Xun's first short story written in *bai-hua*, "The Diary of a Madman." The story attacked Confucian morality for being hypocritical and for using lofty sen-

timents and ideas to camouflage a "man-eat-man" society, which it in fact fostered. The story was an immediate success.

The literary revolution, like the movement for new culture, was a conscious attempt by intellectuals to serve a national cause. Indeed, writers who wrote the most beautiful *wen-yan* found it difficult to handle the so-called *bai-hua*, the language of the common man, ricksha-pullers and peddlers, which differed from region to region; ultimately Beijing spoken language and Beijing dialect became the basis of the national language.

The need for literature to bear a heavy social responsibility is represented dramatically in the life of Lu Xun (1881–1936), considered by many to be China's greatest modern writer. Lu Xun went to Japan in 1902 to study medicine. "I dreamed a beautiful dream," he writes, "that on my return to China I would cure patients . . . who had been wrongly treated. If a war broke out I would serve as an army doctor. At the same time I would strengthen my countrymen's faith in reform." He worked hard in medical school, until one day, during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the teacher showed lantern slides in which a Chinese, allegedly working as a spy for the Russians, was executed by the Japanese. Lu Xun felt humiliated by the manner in which the Japanese students cheered the incident, but what shocked him even more was that the film showed a crowd of Chinese standing around apathetically watching the beheading. "Because of this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be can only serve to be made examples of . . . It is not necessarily deplorable no matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at this time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement."<sup>4</sup>

This group of intellectual leaders, bold and iconoclastic, found it easy to win over

youthful minds in debunking Confucianism, but they could not readily fill the void being created in cultural values. Democracy and science, held up as substitutes for the national heritage, remained rhetorical expressions, not easy to realize.

### THE MAY FOURTH INCIDENT: 1919

China had entered the war against Germany in 1917, but it could not take over German interests in Shandong because Japanese actions there had already precluded that possibility. China, however, hoped that the Allies, particularly the United States, would help in getting the Japanese to vacate Shandong. These hopes were shattered when it was revealed at the Versailles peace negotiations that England, France, and Italy had signed secret treaties agreeing to Japan's claims to Shandong. Even America had recognized that Japan had special interests in China. The news stunned China.

Students in Beijing, who had planned to demonstrate on May 7 (National Humiliation Day) in 1919, advanced the date to May 4 to combine their protest against Japan with that against the injustice of the Versailles decision. Three thousand students marched through Beijing, shouting slogans and carrying banners, some with inscriptions written in blood, that denounced the Twenty-one Demands, international justice, and Duan Qi-rui's warlord government. Some students went to the house of the cabinet minister known to have been working for the Japanese and set fire to it. Under pressure from the Japanese, the government tried to suppress the students by arresting them, but Beijing rulers had underestimated public sentiment. The arrest of over 1,000 students filled the jails to capacity but failed to halt the movement. Large numbers of women students, for the first time, sallied forth to fill the ranks of the arrested heroes.

The call for protest was heard throughout the country. Teachers, journalists, lawyers, doctors, other professionals, mer-



chants, shopkeepers, and labor organizations in all major cities responded with sympathetic strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations. The government finally gave in to the pressure. The pro-Japanese ministers were dismissed, and the Chinese delegation did not sign the Versailles Treaty.

The importance of the nationwide disturbances and protests that lasted for several months lies not in the impact they had on the treaty powers (which was nil) or on warlord politics (which continued unchanged despite Duan's resignation) but in being the first sign of intellectual-led mass nationalism in urban China. The seven-day general strike in Shanghai in June was remarkable because it showed how students, merchants, industrialists, workers, and shopkeepers could create ad hoc organizations and collaborate in shutting down the biggest industrial city in the country.

The famous writer Ba jin recalls in his autobiographical novel *Jia* (The Family) how the May Fourth happenings affected his hometown in remote Sichuan:

[I]n 1919 the May Fourth Movement began. Fiery, bitter newspaper articles awakened in Chueh-hsin memories of his youth. Like his two younger brothers he avidly read the Peking dispatches carried in the local press, and news of the big strike in Shanghai on June 3, which followed. When the local paper reprinted articles from the *New Youth* and *Weekly Review* magazines, he hurried to the only bookstore in town that was selling these journals and bought the latest issue of the first, and two or three issues of the second. Their words were like sparks setting off a conflagration in the brothers' hearts. Aroused by the fresh approach and the ardent phrases, the brothers found themselves in complete agreement with the writer's sentiments.<sup>5</sup>

This intellectual and nationalistic ferment led to a rapid expansion of the press in China and with it the spread of "new culture." Hundreds of new periodicals, written in the vernacular, introduced every kind of Western idea to readers hungry for new ideas. The popular use of the term "new" in the titles of many of these magazines reflects the passionate desire of the educated classes to revitalize

China: *The New Man, New China, The New Life, The New Student*.

The May Fourth Incident shifted the intellectual movement from culture to politics. In late 1919 *New Youth* published a manifesto that articulated the need for a new political philosophy:

Although we do not believe in the omnipotence of politics, we recognize that politics is an important aspect of public life. And we believe that in a genuine democracy, political rights must be distributed to all people. Even though there may be limitations, the criteria for distribution will be whether people work or not, rather than whether they own property or not. This kind of politics is really inevitable in the process of introducing the new era and a useful instrument in the development of the new society.<sup>6</sup>

However, as intellectuals turned to politics, questions of political ideology began to split the intelligentsia, which had so far been united in its attacks on Confucian conservatism. Politicians like Sun Yat-sen, quick to recognize the emergence of the urban classes, particularly the students, as a valuable patriotic force, began to woo them to their side. It cannot be doubted that the May Fourth Movement led to the establishment of the National Students Union (1919) or that it paved the way for the founding of the Chinese Communist party (1921), the General Labor Union (1922), and the reorganization of the Guomindang (1924).

## THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA

To those Chinese who had believed that the postwar peace would bring morality to international relations along the lines enunciated in President Wilson's Fourteen Points (among which were evacuation of occupied territory and the right of national self-determination), the Versailles Treaty was not only disappointing but it also brought anger and revulsion against the immorality of the West. In the words of Li Da-zhao (1889–1927), professor of history and head of the library at Beijing University and an important contribu-

tor to *New Youth*, "When the war ended, we had dreams about the victory of humanism and peace . . . . When we look . . . at the Paris Peace Conference . . . where have the freedom and rights of the small and weak peoples not been sacrificed to a few robber states?"<sup>7</sup> Even Liang Qi-chao, for so long an ardent advocate of Westernization, revised his admiration of the West and declared that a blind worship of science had made the West spiritually bankrupt. He recommended that China, while accepting science and technology, should not give up its traditional moral idealism.

At this critical juncture the 1917 October Revolution that established the Communist government in Russia offered an alternative solution to China's problems. Although the fledgling communist state, internally unstable and externally hemmed in by antagonistic capitalist powers, would take time to have an impact on the politics of the modern world, the Soviet Union from its very inception became a symbol of hope for many revolutionary groups in colonial countries. And from its very inception the Soviet Union took upon itself the role of leading world revolutionary movements. The Soviet Union worked through the Communist International (popularly known as the Comintern), which became an organ for the exercise of Soviet foreign policy by means other than conventional state-to-state relations.

### *The Establishment of the Chinese Communist Party*

The success of the Communist revolution in Russia proved not only that Marxism could be efficacious in an industrially backward country (like China) but that Marxism also offered a satisfactory explanation for China's ills. China was backward not because of its culture but because foreign imperialists and feudal warlords were collaborating to keep it poor and weak. Culture would change with the change in the ruling class. China did not have to reject its past but put it in the context of universal historical change. Lenin's thesis—that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism and that anti-imperialistic nationalist

revolt in colonial and semicolonial countries could hasten the downfall of capitalism in advanced industrial countries and further world revolution—was attractive to political activists in China. According to Lenin, this anti-imperialist revolution in the colonial and semicolonial countries need not be based on the industrial proletariat and could have a national-bourgeois character. With the collapse of imperialism and thereby of capitalism, the colonial and semicolonial countries could move on to the socialist stage, bypassing the capitalist stage.

Russian experience had shown that instead of depending on the spontaneous uprising of the working classes, the revolution could be led by a politically active intelligentsia, who would head a Communist party, the vanguard of the revolution. By embracing Marxism, the Chinese would find themselves a part of the historical progression that would place them ahead of the capitalist West. Yet all these ideas took some time to develop because not many Chinese intellectuals were immediately touched by the events in Russia.

Among the first to respond enthusiastically to the Bolshevik Revolution was Li Da-zhao, who published an article in *New Youth* in October 1918 entitled "The Victory of Bolshevism." He hailed the Russian Revolution and said, "Henceforth all national boundaries, all differences of classes, all barriers to freedom will be swept away . . . . [Bolshevism] expresses the common sentiments of twentieth century mankind."<sup>8</sup> Li had accepted the messianic claims of the Marxist revolution without knowing much about Marxism. However, he soon established a circle of students to study and discuss the ideology. A young intellectual from Hunan, Mao Ze-dong (1893–1976), was part of this group. In May 1919, before the anti-imperialist frenzy of the May Fourth Incident had not yet died down, Li edited an issue of *New Youth* entirely devoted to Marxism.

In July, against the background of the Chinese demonstrations attacking the West, Moscow elaborated on the Soviet Union's repudiation, first made in 1918, of imperialist rights gained in China by czarist Russia. The

Soviet Union announced that it would voluntarily and unilaterally withdraw from the territories acquired by the czars; renounce the Boxer indemnities; and return, without compensation, the Chinese Eastern Railway and other concessions. Although ultimately the Soviet Union did not give up many of the privileges gained under the unequal treaties, this announcement naturally had a powerful pro-Soviet impact on the radical Chinese intellectuals.

In 1920, with the secret help of the Comintern agent Gregory Voitinsky, Communist cells were established in Beijing, Shanghai, Hunan (under Mao Ze-dong), and Hubei. Chen Du-xiu, who after his arrest by the authorities as one of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement had left Beijing for Shanghai, also met with Voitinsky and was totally won over to communism. In 1921 the Communist Party of China (CPC)\* was formally established by 12 or 13 delegates (there is debate about the exact figure), representing less than a 100 members, who met secretly in Shanghai. Chen was elected secretary general of the party.

Since from these small beginnings the party ultimately was to bring about a Communist revolution, the question is worth asking, How could intellectuals like Chen Du-xiu who appeared so deeply committed to democracy turn so quickly to an authoritarian ideology? The answer lies in the fact that these intellectuals were committed to saving China and not to any particular political ideology. Their approach was basically pragmatic. It is worth noting that a year before the CPC was founded "Chen had toyed with the idea that China should adopt Christianity because Christianity could be 'progressive' in creating a citizenry with purer feelings of sincerity."<sup>9</sup> So, when the Russian experience made Marxism a possible practical guide to Chinese revolution, the Chinese intellectuals turned to it and found it more appealing than the liberal democratic model. In an age

\*Some refer to it as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) but the Chinese, themselves, use the term "the Communist Party of China."

when science was made so much of, the Communist creed was "scientific." It claimed that it provided a rational, scientific, explanation of world history that placed colonial and semicolonial countries like China in the context of universal progression. This provided the frustrated Chinese an optimistic view of their future.

It was also far easier for the Chinese intellectuals, with a tradition of a totalistic Confucian ideology, to replace Confucianism with the new totalistic ideology of communism. Like Confucianism, communism presented a single universal truth, a doctrine that emphasized the group over the individual while sanctioning a leadership role to the intellectuals. That Confucian "harmony" was replaced with communist "struggle" did not jar the subconscious of the intellectuals, who were consciously involved in an attempt to make a wholesale change in traditional values.

#### *The Soviet Union, Sun Yat-sen and the CPC*

As we have seen, Sun Yat-sen's political fortune was at a low point in 1922, when he was expelled from Guangzhou by the warlord Chen Jiong-ming. So far, Sun, who had maintained a sporadic correspondence with Moscow and met some of the Russian agents in China, had basically kept aloof from the Soviets, perhaps because of his fear of British intervention in Guangzhou or because he was confident of achieving success on his own. Besides, even the Soviet Union had made no definite overture to which Sun could give serious consideration. In 1922-1923 Moscow's reading of the Chinese situation changed critically. The Russian agent in China, Adolf Joffe, after meeting Beijing militarists and other public leaders, came to the conclusion that Sun personified the Chinese revolution and that a united front between the Guomindang and the CPC could lead to the reunification of China and the ousting of the imperialists.

When approached by Joffe in 1922, Sun, who by this time had lost faith in his warlord friends and had despaired of getting any recognition or aid from the West, was highly

receptive to the Soviet offer of aid. The negotiations between the two resulted in the Sun-Joffe declaration of January 1923. Sun got Joffe to agree that conditions in China were not suitable for communism or the Soviet system but that China needed unification and independence on the basis of Sun's Three Peoples' Principles (nationalism, democracy, and "peoples livelihood"—explained below). In return for Soviet aid, Sun agreed to collaborate with the CPC and accepted the postponement of the issues connected with the Chinese Eastern Railway and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Outer Mongolia. Shortly thereafter, Moscow supplied the Guomindang with monetary and military aid, military experts, and a political advisor in the person of Michael Borodin.

Many in Sun's party doubted the wisdom of the Guomindang-CPC alliance, but Sun managed to allay most of their fears by publicly announcing that in case the Communists went counter to Guomindang policies, they would be expelled, and that in case the Soviets tried to subvert the Guomindang, he would oppose Russia. Sun explained that in following the propaganda and organization techniques of the Soviet Union, the Guomindang would become a mass party, something it had never been before.

In the meantime, Chen Jiong-ming was forced out of Guangzhou, and the new power holders invited the generalissimo to return to Guangzhou. In March 1923 Sun established a military government in Guangzhou, which laid the foundations of the future government of China. A few months later, Sun sent his military aide, Chiang Kai-shek, to the Soviet Union to study the Bolshevik army and party systems. Although Sun had insisted that Moscow recognize that the Soviet system was unsuitable for China, he in fact borrowed heavily from it because it strengthened his own ideas of revolutionary strategy. During the three stages of his revolution (military conquest, political tutelage, and finally constitutional government), Sun emphasized the need for his party to wield a monopoly of power for the initial two stages, and he demanded personal allegiance and obedi-

ence from the members of the party. The Leninist party and army organizations reinforced his views of how power should be organized.

The Three People's Principles, which had first been enunciated before the collapse of the Qing dynasty, were redefined. The principle of nationalism, which had earlier meant anti-Manchuism, was now interpreted to mean the unification of races within China, elimination of inequalities among the nations of the world, and a struggle against foreign imperialism. The last part, added after Sun failed to get control over Guangzhou customs revenues in late 1923, appealed to the emerging national consciousness.

Sun gave an original twist to the principle of democracy by making a distinction between "sovereign power" and "ability." The people, although lacking ability, retained sovereign power and could use it through the institutions of suffrage, recall, initiative, and referendum, but the high-powered government was to be run by men of ability, a group of experts. Sun wanted to ensure that China would have strong political leadership. The government was to be organized on the basis of a five-power constitution that added a censorate and an examination branch, taken from Chinese tradition, to the modern branches of executive, legislature, and judiciary. Sun extended the meaning of "the people's livelihood" by adding "control of capital" to the "equalization of land rights." Although categorically rejecting Marxism, Sun envisaged a kind of state socialism, but he still showed limited understanding of the problems of the peasants. At the same time he made statements that were vague enough to give the impression that he was for communism. Thus, he says at one place, "Not only should we not say that communism conflicts with the *Min-sheng* [people's livelihood] Principle, but we should even claim communism as a good friend . . . . Our Principle of Livelihood is a form of communism . . . [Its] great aim . . . is communism."<sup>10</sup>

The Guomindang was reorganized with the help of the Soviet advisor, Michael

Borodin, and its final pyramidal structure, as approved by the First Party Congress of the Guomintang in January 1924, was much like that of any Communist party: four tiers of authority constituting the central, the provincial, the county, and the district party organizations. The National Party Congress (NPC) theoretically possessed the highest authority and was supposed to meet every other year. Actually it met only five times in 20 years. In the absence of the NPC, its authority was exercised by the Central Executive Committee, in fact by the few members who made up the Standing Committee of the Central Executive Committee. Parallel to the Central Executive Committee was the Central Supervisory Committee, which was concerned with matters of discipline and finance. The party worked on the principle of democratic centralism, which meant that once the decisions had been reached (presumably democratically), the lower levels had to accept them unquestioningly. The most important person in the party of course was Sun, who was constitutionally made president for life and given the power to approve or disapprove resolutions of the party congresses.

The first Guomintang congress also approved the collaboration between the Guomintang and the CPC. The CPC members could join the Guomintang in their *individual* capacity and had to accept Guomintang discipline. The orthodox Moscow view was that the revolution would be carried to culmination in two stages—the bourgeois-national stage and the socialist stage. The first stage had to be led by a bourgeois-nationalist party representing *all four classes* of society (bourgeois, petty bourgeois, workers, and peasants). The Communists joining the Guomintang would form a “bloc within,” which would gradually expand its activities and hold over the inner machinery of the party and government. Called the First United Front, the alliance lasted from 1924 to 1927.

The CPC under Chen Du-xiu was reluctant to accept this arrangement, which made the CPC subservient to a bourgeois party and took away CPC independence. However, Chen, who would have preferred a “bloc

without” approach, which would have given a sense of equality between the parties, was forced by the Comintern to agree to the policies framed in Moscow. As Borodin advised them, the Communists would have to be the “coolies” of the revolution until the right time came for them to take power. Perhaps Moscow was right, because in 1924 the CPC was hardly a party with any strength. The alliance promptly gave it a framework within which it could expand. Among the 24 members of the newly elected Central Executive Committee of the Guomintang were 4 Communists, including Li Da-zhao; and of the 17 alternate members 3 were Communists, 2 of whom were Mao Ze-dong and Qu Qiu-bai. Naturally, all these Communists were required to take out Guomintang membership.

In May 1924 the Guomintang military academy, headed by Chiang Kai-shek, opened in Whampoa (Huangpu), near Guangzhou. Sun at last had not only an army of his own but also, following the Leninist principle, an army subordinate to the party. In the Soviet style the academy had a political wing to provide political indoctrination (based on the Three People’s Principles) to the military officers. Among those holding the most senior posts in the political department was the young Communist party member Zhou En-lai (1898–1976), who often had to act as the director of the department; Zhou En-lai would later be one of the key figures in the Communist government of China. Another communist, who also was to rise to the top of the power pyramid in the People’s Republic of China, was Lin Biao (1908–1971) who graduated from the academy in 1925 at the age of 17. But Communist influence in Whampoa was limited and indeed could not counter the growing mystique of Chiang Kai-shek. Guomintang’s new army got an opportunity to show its growing capability in fall 1924, when it crushed a British-inspired uprising by the Guangzhou Merchant Volunteers and in the process expanded the area under Nationalist control.

Despite the limitations placed on the CPC in the First United Front, the years 1924

to 1926 were good for the Communist party. The party expanded its mass organization operations, and its membership increased rapidly, helped by a new wave of anti-imperialist nationalism that followed the May Thirtieth and June Twenty-third incidents in 1925. In May the workers of a Japanese-owned Shanghai cotton mill went on strike to protest the dismissal of some of their colleagues. The factory guards opened fire, killing one and wounding several workers. This act resulted in widespread resentment, and on May 30, 10,000 persons gathered in the International Settlement to demonstrate against the Japanese imperialists. A clash developed between the demonstrators and the British police; the police opened fire on the crowd, killing and wounding several persons in the process. The result was that 200,000 workers put down tools, 50,000 students quit their schools and colleges, and many merchants closed their business establishments on June 1. On June 11 the Shanghai Federation of Workers, Merchants, and Students held a mass meeting and passed a resolution making 17 demands, among which were withdrawal of foreign forces from China; abrogation of extraterritoriality; freedom of speech, publication, and assembly; and the right to strike and organize trade unions.

Nothing came of the demands, and for political reasons, the organizers called off the strikes at the end of June, but events in Shanghai reflected the new mood of the country. The May Thirtieth incident inflamed national sentiment and angered the Chinese, who demonstrated in most of the major cities, formed anti-imperialist associations, and demanded the end of unequal treaties. The strikes, protests, and boycotts that swept the country exceeded anything the nation had witnessed earlier.

The response in the industrially and commercially advanced Hong Kong-Guangzhou area was particularly bitter. In mid-June a sympathy strike involving many tens of thousands of workers was organized in Hong Kong and led to the imposition of martial law in the colony. On June 23 100,000 persons, including workers, students, military

cadets from Whampoa academy, and other citizens of Guangzhou, demonstrated outside the foreign concession area in that city. Just as in Shanghai, this demonstration led to foreign troops opening fire and killing 52 demonstrators and wounding over 100 others. A strike involving 200,000 workers followed in Hong Kong, which tied up the port for 16 months. The strike was led by the Communists.

In this feverish anticapitalist, anti-imperialist milieu, the CPC found ample opportunity to exert its influence and acquire a leadership role in the labor movement. The growth of the CPC was phenomenal. From 57 members in 1921, it rose slowly to a strength of 980 in January 1925; then within a year and a half, it expanded to over 30,000 members. By mid-1927 the membership soared to 58,000, with another 30,000 in the Communist Youth League. These figures amply prove that although working under the Guomintang banner and within the Guomintang framework, the CPC had managed to maintain its independent identity. Its success was partly due to the fact that the Guomintang mass movement programs were directed by Communists, which implied that the CPC was assuming the confrontational role of a party within a party.

The Guomintang, already a large party in 1923, also expanded its membership during these years; but after the death of Sun Yat-sen in March 1925, the Nationalist leadership split up, and troubles also began between the Nationalists and the Communists. Incidentally, Sun, the eternal optimist, died in Beijing where he had gone to participate in a “national reconstruction conference” arranged by a dominant northern warlord who had no genuine interest in resolving the problem of peace and national unification.

### *The Rise of Chiang Kai-shek*

During his lifetime Sun had kept the various factions in the Nationalist party working together; after him no leader of stature could command the allegiance of all party members.

The three most important leaders of the Guomindang, who had all been close associates of Sun and who aspired to his position, were Hu Han-min (1879–1936), Wang Jing-wei (1883–1944), and Liao Zhong-kai (1878–1925). Wang and Liao belonged to the left wing of the party (Liao being far more pro-Communist than Wang), and Hu can be said to have headed the right wing. At the death of Sun Yat-sen a collective leadership, which included Hu, Wang, and Liao, declared the establishment of the national government of China on July 1, 1925.

However, the collective approach collapsed when Liao was assassinated in August 1925. Although the murder still remains a mystery, Hu was implicated in the plot and forced to leave Guangzhou on a mission to Moscow. Some of the rightist dissidents in the party met in November in the Buddhist temple in the western hills outside Beijing, where Sun's remains had been temporarily interred, and called for the expulsion of the Communists from the Guomindang, retirement of Borodin from his office as advisor to the party, and the suspension of Wang Jing-wei's party membership for six months.

Contrary to their demands, the party, in the absence of Hu, came to be dominated by Wang Jing-wei and the Communists as was reflected in the composition of the various leading committees at the Second National Conference of the Guomindang in February 1926. More than 33 percent of the delegates to the congress were Communists, who also represented 20 percent of the membership in the Central Executive Committee. The congress took action against the Western Hills faction by expelling some and reprimanding the others. Under Borodin's advice Chiang Kai-shek, who had so far remained aloof from the civilian leadership of the party, was brought in as a member of the Central Executive Committee and the Standing Committee. There was every reason to believe that Chiang, the passionately loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen, the man who had suppressed several right-wing military threats to the regime and had made many anti-imperialist speeches, was a trustworthy leftist.

The new balance of power was shortly destroyed by the notorious *Zhong-shan* incident. On March 18, 1926 the *Zhong-shan*, a Nationalist gunboat under the command of a Communist, moved to the vicinity of Whampoa Military Academy. It is not known even today who ordered the transfer of the gunboat; the Communists say that it was Chiang himself who did it. Chiang, considering this act to be a Communist conspiracy to kidnap him, staged a counter-coup. He declared martial law in Guangzhou; disarmed the Communist-directed workers' militias of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike Committee; detained many Communists, including those attached to the Military Academy; and put the Soviet advisors under house arrest. Since Chiang had taken this action without authorization from Wang Jing-wei who was his superior and head of state, Wang showed his resentment by withdrawing from active politics and leaving in May for France for a "vacation."

With the leaders of the left and right wings out of the way, Chiang was now unquestionably in control of Guomindang affairs. Even Borodin was not around to exert any pressure on him: Borodin was away in the north negotiating with the warlord Feng Yuxiang, who had moved to the Soviet side in 1926. When he returned to Guangzhou in April, Borodin found the situation not entirely to his liking, but he could not afford to have his masters in Moscow believe that he had failed in maintaining control of the Chinese revolution. Also, in the power struggle that had developed in Russia after Lenin's death in 1924, it was imperative that Borodin strengthen Stalin's position by confirming that Stalin's policies in China were correct.

So Borodin had to make a compromise with Chiang which was helped by the fact that Chiang needed Soviet aid as much as the Soviets needed the Guomindang. On his side, Chiang reconfirmed his loyalty to the Three Great Policies of Sun Yat-sen (alliance with the Soviet Union, collaboration with the CPC, and development of mass movements), denounced the Guomindang right wing, and took some actions meant to heal the breach

between him and the CPC. There was no real evidence to prove that Chiang was not indeed basically a leftist. Did not the Western press in Shanghai and Hong Kong call him the "red general"? On his part, Borodin blamed the CPC for some of the troubles and agreed to limit Communist influence in the Nationalist party. The Comintern also tended to belittle the importance of the *Zhong-shan* incident, claiming that it was an invention of the imperialists.

Some in the CPC did suggest that the Communist party withdraw from the alliance and follow an independent policy, but Borodin and the Comintern would not accept that course of action. There was, no doubt, danger that the CPC, despite its

impressive successes in the mass movement, could be easily crushed out of existence; however, more importantly, its departure from the United Front would have hurt Stalin's cause.

Another major concession that Borodin had to make to reestablish the Guangzhou-Moscow alliance was to agree to Chiang's timetable for the northern expedition. Military operations to unify China began in May 1926 with Chiang as commander-in-chief. The expeditionary force, numbering about 100,000 men, was divided into two main flanks. The left flank, driving directly north, gained rapid success and reached Wuhan by the end of the year; the right flank, under Chiang, occupied Jiangxi and Fujian. The

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### CHIANG KAI-SHEK (1887–1975): EARLY YEARS

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Chiang Kai-shek was born in the coastal province of Zhejiang into a merchant family of modest means. His father died when Chiang was nine years old and his mother had to make many sacrifices to bring up six children.

Troubled by China's plight in the post-Boxer period and inspired by Japan's victory over Russia in the 1904–1905 war, Chiang decided on a military career. He entered Baoding Military School (which later became famous as Baoding Military Academy) in 1907 and was sent to Japan for advanced military training from 1908 to 1910. Upon completing his studies, Chiang served for a brief time in the regular Japanese army.

Chiang, who already had strong anti-Manchu feelings, became a more ardent revolutionary after meeting Sun Yat-sen and other members of the *Tong-meng-hui* in Japan. When news of the Wuchang uprising reached Japan, Chiang hurried back to help the republican cause. He was involved in some military action but never rose to any position of prominence.

After Yuan's usurpation of power and the failure of the 1911 revolution, Chiang once again left for Japan, returning briefly to take part in the abortive second revolution. Soon thereafter, in 1914, Chiang joined Sun's new Revolu-

tionary party and became a sworn follower of Sun, who had also sought refuge in Japan. In 1915 Chiang came back to China to participate in the movement against Yuan's attempt to become monarch. It is during these years that Chiang developed a close friendship with the brothers Chen Guo-fu and Chen Li-fu, who were later to play an important role in Chiang's government.

Many details of Chiang's activities from 1915 to 1921 are missing, but it is known that during this period he occasionally helped Sun in fund raising and as a military advisor and that he was somehow involved with the business community and the stock exchange in Shanghai. He does not appear to have taken any part in the May Fourth Movement.

From 1922, when Sun appointed him chief of staff, Chiang rose to become one of the most important lieutenants of Sun; in 1923, after Sun's alliance with the Soviet Union, Chiang was sent to Russia to study the Soviet military system. On his return he headed the Whampoa Military Academy, which provided the Guomindang with its own army and finally gave Sun an opportunity to carry out his revolutionary goals for China.

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heavily left-wing government council, left behind in Guangzhou (which included two CPC members and Borodin), wanted to shift the government from Guangzhou to Wuhan. Chiang, along with the Central Executive Committee members who favored him, declared for Nanchang, which was Chiang's new base. The transfer of the government to Wuhan (January 1, 1927) made it obvious that Borodin and the party left were going to resist Chiang. Incidentally, when the revolutionaries occupied the British settlement in Hankou, the British government decided to relinquish its concessions in Hankou and Jiu-jiang. This was the first success of the revolutionaries against imperialism.

The points of conflict between the Wuhan and the Nanchang camps became further complicated by the entry into the picture of warlords, who decided to join the Nationalists; by Chiang Kai-shek's political volte-face; and by the contradictory policies emanating from Moscow. The commanders of the left flank, advised by Borodin, wanted to continue their northward march to link with Feng Yu-xiang, whose base was Inner Mongolia and who was now considered a pro-Soviet revolutionary. Chiang wanted to move eastward to occupy Nanjing and Shanghai. In the meantime the Nationalist armies had nearly trebled by the incorporation of troops belonging to warlords who had switched to the Nationalist side. These opportunistic militarists could hardly be expected to support radical policies. The Communists, whose mass organizations in the countryside had provided invaluable help to the expedition, were caught in a dilemma. They had aroused the peasantry with their revolutionary anti-landlord and land-to-the-tiller slogans, but their alliance with the Guomindang (dominated by the landlord class) meant that they could not deliver on their promises.

While Wuhan was becoming increasingly anti-Chiang and Chiang was growing weary of the leftists, Chiang's forces continued to be successful in the eastern sector. Hangzhou was occupied on February 19, 1927. The Communist-organized armed workers in Shanghai, despite the brutal manner in

which the local warlord tried to suppress them, arose and liberated the Chinese city of Shanghai on March 21 and thus enabled Chiang's force to occupy Shanghai with ease on March 23. Nanjing was captured on March 24. However, because some foreigners had been attacked by troops from one of the revolutionary units (the British consul was wounded, and among those killed was an American missionary), the British and Americans retaliated by ordering their gunboats, anchored on the Yangtze, to bombard the city, and foreign forces in the International Settlement were reinforced. Chiang went to Shanghai and tried to assure the foreigners that the Nationalists, although determined to rid the country of imperialism, were not out to harm them individually or to change the international treaty system by mob violence.

It is not known at what stage Chiang was assured of the financial support from the Shanghai mercantile interests that was to enable him to break from Wuhan, but it must have been in fall 1926 and early 1927, when his old friends from Shanghai visited him in Nanchang. In any case, it is known that the anti-Chiang campaign in Wuhan was assuming disturbing proportions and that Wuhan was denying Chiang the finances and supplies he needed. The return of Wang Jing-wei to Wuhan in April strengthened the left-wing leadership, and Borodin managed to increase the role of the CPC within the Guomindang. The growing power of the CPC and its Soviet backers alarmed many in the country, and diverse forces began to gel in favor of Chiang Kai-shek who had now turned antileftist and begun to express rightist views. These forces included the conservatives inside and outside the Guomindang party, the Chinese mercantile community, the pro-British and pro-Japanese warlords, and of course the imperialist powers.

On April 6, 1927, the Beijing warlord authorities raided the Soviet embassy and confiscated documents proving that the Soviet diplomats were actively supporting subversion by Chinese Communists. Beijing broke off diplomatic relations with Moscow and arrested and executed many Communists

with Soviet connections, one of whom was Li Da-zhao. On April 12, Chiang ordered the disarming of the Workers' General Union in Shanghai. The action resulted in a reign of terror and a brutal massacre of the labor leaders and members of the Communist party. On April 15 the pro-Chiang Guomindang authorities in Guangzhou suppressed the Communist-directed mass organizations in Guangzhou, killing over 2,000 Communists in the process. On April 18 Chiang, supported by most of the members of the Guomindang Central Executive Committee, set up his own national government in Nanjing. A day earlier, the Wuhan government had dismissed Chiang from his post of commander-in-chief of the Nationalist army and from membership in the Guomindang.

Even more than in the cities, Communist activity in the countryside was causing the conservatives to fear the CPC alliance. During the first year of the northern expedition, as the expeditionary forces moved through the crowded southern provinces, the Communist-inspired peasant associations exploded in numbers. For example, consider the single province of Hunan. It is calculated that whereas only about 200,000 peasants were organized in associations on the eve of the northern expedition, their number in mid-1927 was over 4.5 million.<sup>11</sup> The radicalized peasants often refused to pay rents and at places even seized the land. Mao Ze-dong, in his enthusiastic report entitled the "Peasant Movement in Hunan," delivered in March 1927, said,

"All power to the peasant association" has become a reality. . . . The local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords have been deprived of all rights to speak, and none of them dares even mutter dissent. . . . [Although "terrible" and "excessive" this] rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the officers in the Guomindang armies and members of the Guomindang, who came from the landlord-gentry class, obviously felt threatened by this aspect

of the revolution. The peasants did not even spare the parents of CPC members. The father of Li Li-san, one of the most prominent Communist leaders, was killed by the peasants in his Hunan village home, even though he had in his possession a letter written by his son guaranteeing that the old man was in favor of peasant associations.

Having "lost" Chiang Kai-shek, Moscow tried to concentrate the left-wing forces in Wuhan, eliminate the bourgeoisie from the alliance, and deprive Chiang of his powers. The CPC dilemma was that the party was directed by Moscow to heighten agrarian revolution without jeopardizing its collaboration with the Guomindang. These were mutually incompatible goals. The issues were further clouded because of the debate between Borodin and the newly arrived (April 2, 1927) Comintern agent M. N. Roy. Borodin wanted to continue the northern expedition to link up with Feng Yu-xiang, and to ensure the loyalty of the army officers, Borodin wanted to put restraints on the peasant movement. Roy, on the other hand, wanted the left to consolidate the revolutionary base by carrying out the agrarian revolution before further military expansion. At the end of April, the fifth congress of the CPC approved both the continuation of the northern expedition and the radical land program.

Moscow had overlooked the fact that most of the troops under Wuhan belonged to warlords who had joined the Guomindang for expediency. By appointing them to Guomindang military posts and allowing them to retain control of their armies (although these armies were now units of the Guomindang force), the Wuhan government had not only diluted the ideological purity of the Nationalist military but also weakened its own power and authority. Thus, for example, on May 21, 1927, the Guomindang commander-in-chief for Hunan, the former warlord Tang Sheng-zhi, realizing that the Wuhan government decrees (advising mass organizations to restrain peasant excesses) carried no weight, took direct action against peasant associations and labor unions. Many hundreds of peasants and Communist organizers were

executed for sabotaging the rear lines of the northern expedition. Under these circumstances, how could the CPC carry on its revolutionary activities in the countryside? And what role could the Guomintang "left" play?

On June 1, 1927, Stalin sent a cable to Roy giving new guidelines for the Chinese revolution:

Without an agrarian revolution victory is impossible. . . . We are decidedly in favor of the land actually being seized by masses from below. . . . A large number of new peasants and working class leaders from the ranks must be drawn into the Central Committee of the Kuomintang [Guomintang]. . . . It is necessary to liquidate the dependence on unreliable generals. Mobilize about 20,000 Communists and about 50,000 revolutionary workers and peasants . . . and organize your own reliable army before it is too late. . . . If the Kuomintangists do not learn to be revolutionary Jacobins, they will be lost both to the people and to the revolution.<sup>13</sup>

According to Zhang Guo-tao, a founding member of the CPC, "When this telegram was read at the meeting of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the CPC, everyone had the reaction of not knowing whether to cry or to laugh. They unanimously felt that it was impossible to implement the order."<sup>14</sup> It appears that Stalin presumed that Soviet aid, along with the Comintern agents and Soviet advisors, was indispensable to the Chinese revolution. Stalin did not realize that without the "unreliable generals," Wuhan was militarily vulnerable. In any case, the Guomintang left wing may have been left of center but was by no means Marxist-Leninist in its thinking. Roy, for some inexplicable reason, showed the telegram to Wang Jing-wei, hoping perhaps to win over the radical Wang to Stalin's cause. Wang was shocked. He felt that Moscow wanted to turn the Guomintang into a tool of the CPC and bring communism to China. This policy went against the goals laid down by Sun Yat-sen, who had clearly stated that the Communist, or the Soviet, system was not applicable to China. There was no way the United Front could now be saved.

At the same time Borodin also failed in his mission to gain the support of Feng Yu-xiang and the northern provinces. Both Wuhan and Nanjing were wooing Feng. On June 6 the Shanxi warlord Yan Xi-shan, a neighbor of Feng, joined Chiang Kai-shek and was appointed commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary Army in the north. On June 21, Feng sent a secret telegram to the Wuhan government, expressing dissatisfaction with the Communist presence in the Guomintang and suggesting that Borodin be sent back to Russia and that the party leaders in Wuhan agree to join the government in Nanjing.

On June 20 the CPC had abjectly conceded everything that the Guomintang could have asked of it, even the leadership and control of the mass organizations and the armed pickets, but to no avail. The suppression of peasant and labor movements continued. On July 13 the Central Committee of the CPC issued a declaration condemning the Wuhan authorities for serving "the reactionary army officers who rose from the ranks of local bullies and evil gentry . . . [and for opposing] the interests of the great majority of the Chinese people."<sup>15</sup> This declaration finally confirmed the widely held suspicion that the CPC was untrustworthy and acting seditiously. On July 23 the government finally expelled all Communists who were working in the Nationalist party, government, and army and ordered the CPC to cease all activity for the duration of the national revolution. On July 24 Wang Jing-wei sent a telegram to Feng Yu-xiang stating that the CPC and Borodin had been dealt with and that the party was ready to move to Nanjing.

The decade of Soviet intervention in Chinese politics ended ignominiously, but it left an indelible mark on the future of the Chinese revolution. Borodin and other Soviet advisors left hurriedly for Russia. Some new Comintern agents arrived to carry on the liaison work with the CPC, which became an illegal, underground party harassed and persecuted by the "legitimate" Nationalist Government at Nanjing.

To strengthen the unity of the party and enable the senior members of the Guomintang, technically his superiors, to come to Nanjing without losing face, Chiang Kai-shek resigned his posts and retired from active politics in August 1927. He used the vacation, for that is what it really was, to marry Sun Yat-sen's sister-in-law, Soong Meiling. The marriage strengthened Chiang's political standing. The Soong family was very well placed: Soong Ching-ling was the highly honored widow of Sun Yat-sen; her brother T.V. Soong was a Harvard-trained financier who, as Chiang's minister of finance would bring the backing of the banking world to the young government; and Yale-educated H.H. Kung (the husband of the third sister, Soon Ai-ling) was a banker and a businessman who had helped to win over Feng Yu-xiang to Chiang's side. Kung joined the government as minister of industry in 1928.

In January 1928, Chiang Kai-shek, at the invitation of the government, returned to his post as the head of the Nationalist military force and resumed the northern expedition to complete the reunification of China.

#### THE FOREIGN POWERS AND CHINA: 1920-1927

In the decade following World War I the Western powers missed their greatest opportunity to influence the modernization of China. Even America, with its heritage of revolution and its moral view of world politics, could not see Sun Yat-sen's potential and reach out to him. Sun had literally begged for help from various Western powers, including America and England. It appears that well-established capitalist democracies, intent on dealing with legitimate governments, have a limited capacity to give positive help to nationalistic revolutionary movements but a limitless capacity to exploit, undermine, and destabilize weak nations struggling for modernization.

After World War I, Japan emerged as a major Pacific power and a potential threat to British and American interests. To stop the naval race among Japan, Britain, and the United States and to restrict the expansion of Japanese influence in Asia, the Washington Conference was held from November 1921 to February 1922. Among the participants were Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, Portugal (representing European interests in East Asia and the Pacific), the United States, Japan, and China. Russia was not invited. The conference produced a series of treaties. One of them, the Four Powers Pact, spelled the end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, replacing it with a pledge by major Western powers of nonintervention in East Asia. Another limited the strength of the capital navies of Britain, the United States, and Japan to a 5:5:3 ratio. Thus Japan, with no navy in the Atlantic, was ensured a superiority in the western Pacific, as against any one of the other two powers taken singly. The Nine-Power Treaty formally declared the support of the powers to the principle of the Open Door, that is, the territorial integrity and administrative independence of China, but this in no way meant an immediate end to the foreign rights and special privileges already squeezed out of China. China, lacking even an effective central government, had no leverage to change the existing unequal treaty system; the foreign powers, although conscious that the time was not far off when they would have to liquidate extraterritoriality and other rights, were not eager to hurry the process.

#### NOTES

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7. Quoted in Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 96.
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9. Ranbir Vohra, *China: The Search for Social Justice and Democracy* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1991; New York: Viking Penguin USA, 1991), p. 17.
10. Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, trans. Frank W. Price (Shanghai: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927), pp. 428–34.
11. The figures vary in different accounts. This is the highest figure I have come across. See Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–1927* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), p. 603.
12. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. I (Beijing: Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 25–28.
13. Robert C. North and Xenia J. Eudin, *M. N. Roy's Mission to China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 106–7.
14. Chang Kuo-t'ao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, p. 637.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 651.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT: 1928–1937

## THE FAILURE OF NATIONAL REINTEGRATION

The unification of China was officially announced when the Guomintang forces occupied Beijing in June 1928. The formal structure of the Nationalist government, under Chiang Kai-shek as president, was inaugurated in Nanjing on October 10, the anniversary of the 1911 revolution. Beijing (Northern Capital) was renamed Beiping (Northern Peace). Technically, the first stage of Sun Yat-sen's three stages to constitutional government (military unification, followed by six years of political tutelage, leading to constitutional democracy) had been completed.

The Guomintang, having established a single-party dictatorship, theoretically could now begin the process of instructing and guiding the people toward democracy. It is debatable whether a conservative party leaning toward authoritarianism could have achieved this goal even under ideal circumstances. But the circumstances were far from ideal. Behind the facade of unification the country still remained divided, and periodic insurrections by warlords and the Communists forced Nanjing to continue to concentrate its efforts on internal pacification, through military action, at the expense of

constructive national endeavors. The role of the military in Chinese politics also expanded because of Japanese expansionist policies aimed at dominating China. Military expenditures and foreign debt payments absorbed over 80 percent of the revenues in 1928–1929, and between 1929 and 1937 (when the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out) the figure never fell much below 66 percent. National reintegration was further hampered by the factional and clique troubles within the Guomintang which kept the party from functioning as a monolithic body that could have provided cohesive and uniform policies.

### *Party Troubles and Civil War*

The Guomintang success was hailed by the war-weary Chinese, particularly by the urban intelligentsia, who hoped that the revolution would at last bring strength and prosperity to the nation and restore its dignity in the eyes of the world. National elation, however, did not last long. Within a year or two it became clear that the Guomintang had lost its revolutionary drive and that its leaders were squabbling for public office to gain personal status and build up private fortunes.

By its very nature the national government during the period of political tutelage (which because of political reasons was never