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From Empire to People's Republic

R. Keith Schoppa

The Chinese empire was born amid the turmoil and wars of the second century BCE. In the first two dynastic regimes, the Qin (221-206 BCE) and the Han (202 BCE-220 CE) several patterns emerged that would persist throughout the empire until 1912. First, when the brutal leader of the Qin state, known historically as Qin Shi Huangdi (literally, "first emperor of Qin"), established a centralized empire, he momentarily put to rest the political centrifugal forces endemic in Chinese feudalism; but relations between center and region and/or locality remained an ongoing issue throughout the empire and the Republic (1912-1949). Tensions between center and locality continue to be problematic in early twenty-first century China in the wake of the economic reforms begun in the 1980s.

Second, while Qin Shi Huangdi tried to burn all books dealing with history, literature, or philosophy, the Han dynasty began to rally around the ideas and approach of Confucius (Kong Fuzi), who had lived in the late fifth century BCE (see Box, **Confucius on Government and Politics**). The Han instituted a rudimentary **civil service examination system** with a strong emphasis on testing mastery of Confucianism. By the Song dynasty (960-1279), the examination had become the jewel in the crown of the imperial Chinese government. It provided political, social, ideological, and cultural unity for China's complex diversity of regional and local cultures. Those who passed the examinations became government officials and the social elite. While the Confucian-based exam was abolished in 1905, the early twenty-first century saw the Chinese government establishing Confucius Institutes around the world to promote the learning of Chinese language and culture.

A third pattern that appeared in the late Han dynasty was the continual interaction between Han Chinese within the Great Wall (which began to be constructed in the Qin dynasty) and non-Han peoples of the steppe beyond the Wall—Mongols, Manchus, and Turks. Over the centuries, these peoples, defined by their mobility in herding flocks, raided and even invaded China within the Wall, a more sedentary society of farmers. At times of greater Chinese strength, the Han Chinese pushed further into steppe lands. From the late thirteenth century on, the interaction between the Han and non-Han peoples became more an ongoing "dialogue" of power, with these outsiders ruling parts of North China from the late eleventh century on, and with the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) and Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1912) ruling all of China. The heritage of these relationships is the early twenty-first century Chinese government's ambivalence in its policies toward ethnic minorities.

Late imperial China reached its zenith of wealth and power during the reign of the Manchu emperor, Qianlong (1736-1795), in a period is known as "**High Qing.**"

CONFUCIUS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Confucius (551-479 BCE) was an ancient Chinese philosopher whose ideas have had an enduring impact on Chinese culture and history. Much of his philosophy is concerned with politics and government, and like other great political thinkers, such as Plato, Confucius focuses on the "good" state that he believes will be the best way for society to be organized and governed. His teachings, including the following observations on political matters, are found in *The Analects of Confucius*, which were compiled by the philosopher's disciples in the generations after his death.

- 2.3 *The Master said: "Lead them by political maneuvers, restrain them with punishments: the people will become cunning and shameless. Lead them by virtue, restrain them with ritual: they will develop a sense of shame and a sense of participation."*
- 12.19 Lord Ji Kang asked Confucius about government, saying, "Suppose I were to kill the bad to help the good: how about that?" Confucius replied: "You are here to govern; what need is there to kill? If you desire what is good, the people will be good. The moral power of the gentleman is the wind; the moral power of the common man is grass. Under the wind, the grass must bend."
- 12.11 Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied: "Let the lord be a lord; the subject a subject; the father a father; the son a son." The Duke said: "Excellent! If indeed the lord is not a lord, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, I could be sure of nothing anymore—not even of my daily food."
- 12.7 Zigong asked about government. The Master said: "Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the trust of the people." Zigong said: "If you had to do without one of these three, which would you give up?"—"Weapons."—"If you had to do without one of the remaining, which would you give up?"—"Food; after all, everyone has to die eventually. But without the trust of the people, no government can stand."
- 2.21 Someone said to Confucius: "Master, why don't you join the government?" The Master said: "In the *Documents* it is said: 'Only cultivate filial piety and be kind to your brothers, and you will be contributing to the body politic.' This is also a form of political action; one need not necessarily join the government."
- 13.13 The Master said: "If a man can steer his own life straight, the tasks of government should be no problem for him. If he cannot steer his own life straight, how could he steer other people straight?"

From *The Analects of Confucius*, translated by Simon Leys (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 6, 8, 56, 57, 58, and 62.

Mid-eighteenth-century military campaigns in central Asia brought the empire 6 million square miles of new territory, and China made Tibet its protectorate. In the foreign policy dubbed the "**tributary system**" by Western scholars, South, Southeast, and East Asian states sent gifts and performed the **kowtow** (*ketou*—literally, "knock head") before the Chinese emperor as symbolic ritual in Chinese eyes of their superiority vis-à-vis the tributary states' subordinate status. Exceptional government leadership created an age of economic prosperity marked by agricultural commercialization and diversification and the importation of crops from the New World. An indication of this remarkable time was the Qianlong emperor's cancellation of annual taxes four times in his reign because the government was so fiscally wealthy. Prosperity brought greater elite wealth, new occupational opportunities, new markets and commercial relationships, and from 1749 to 1790, a 70 percent increase in population up to 301 million. It is not surprising that in the late eighteenth century, the number of people fascinated with China ("Sinophiles") in Europe and the recently established United States grew, impressed with China's "enlightened despotism," meritocracy (a ruling elite based upon the examination), and material culture. Historians have recently focused on the Qing regime, not only for its rule in China, but as the leader of a multi-ethnic empire—establishing effective rule over Turks, Tibetans, and Mongols as well.

The Decline of the Imperial State

Amid the glories of the late eighteenth century were unfortunately many signs of decline and danger. Military campaigns and suppressing rebellions, especially the religious-based White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804), eroded state wealth. A weakening economy and military did not bode well for continuing successes. The emperor's patronage of He Shen, his corrupt personal favorite at the court in the 1780s and 1790s, opened the floodgates to widespread corruption as the courtier parleyed his position into bureaucratic influence and great wealth. His corruption proliferated far beyond his clique to every administrative level. Like a cancer on the body politic, it metastasized into widespread corruption that robbed economic resources and undermined popular respect for the dynasty. The population surge, a sign of growing wealth, ironically posed the greatest long-term danger: the Chinese system of partible inheritance (where inheritance was divided among a family's sons) meant that land per capita shrank markedly. Poverty and bankruptcies rose. The increasingly fiscally strained government had difficulty providing charitable relief and public works for the people, two keys for insuring respect and support for the regime.

China also faced a growing threat from Western empire-building nations, propelled by the alliterative triad of merchants, missionaries, and the military. Chinese culture frowned on commerce with outsiders, seeing itself as being the "Middle Kingdom," and "everything under Heaven," and therefore self-sufficient in all important things. But pressure from the West prompted China to allow trade at the southern city of Guangzhou under a modified tributary arrangement, where the Chinese government orchestrated the music to which Westerners danced. Westerners bought teas and silk; but because they offered nothing the Chinese wanted (woolen textiles for a tropical climate!), Great Britain, in particular, suffered from an unfavorable trade balance with China—until they began to smuggle in opium. Why this drug became such an addiction among the Chinese is still unclear, but the number of chests of opium smuggled into China increased exponentially in the first decades of the nineteenth century—at least as measured by the extent of drug addiction and related currency outflow and soaring inflation. When the Chinese emperor sent an imperial commissioner who used strict measures to quash the smuggling, Great Britain saw it as a cause for war.

In the **Opium War** (1839-1842) Great Britain exacted China's humiliating defeat and forced on it the **Treaty of Nanjing**, the first of many such agreements, called the "**unequal treaties**" because China gave all yet received nothing. This war opened a century of aggression by Western nations against China, transforming the Middle Kingdom into a semi-colony, subject to the demands of many foreign nations. The treaties opened trading ports along the coast and along the Yangtze River, where foreign settlements were carved into existing Chinese cities; some Chinese came then to be ruled by foreigners. These settlements installed **extraterritoriality** with consular jurisdiction under which an accused foreigner would be tried for a crime in a Western, not a Chinese, court. Though Chinese who worked with or were converted by Westerners were not covered by extraterritoriality, Westerners, because of their special legal status, often tried to use their power to protect their Chinese business agents (compradors) or their religious converts. In addition, China lost its right to control and collect its own tariffs. It could not regulate foreign ships' entries into inland waterways, the loss of an important right for any sovereign nation. China's tributary system was nullified: ambassadors of foreign states could now reside permanently in Beijing.

The open propagation of Christianity was guaranteed by the unequal treaties. This meant that missionaries could go anywhere, could purchase property for church and school, and could proselytize at will. Though the impact of late Qing missionaries was complex, on the whole, it was an unhappy one. The political landscape was studded with episodes of violence sparked by the actions of culturally arrogant missionaries who believed they alone had the "Truth"; at core, these episodes were spawned by the cultural imperialism of the missionaries and the tenacious cultural chauvinism of the Chinese.

The nineteenth century was also ravaged by domestic rebellion. The **Taiping Rebellion** (1851-1864), the largest uprising in world history, devastated much of east central and south China, reached militarily into most provinces, and killed an estimated 20 million people. Incubated in an area marked by ethnic rivalry, unemployment, and poverty, and forged into a Utopian crusade based on a bastardized Christianity, the rebellion (turned would-be dynasty) was a major threat to traditional Chinese culture. It promised to dethrone Confucianism and the family as cultural hallmarks, raise the status of women, institute primitive economic communism, and replace social hierarchy with equality (see Box, **The Taiping Plan for Reorganizing Chinese Society**). Though many elements caused its demise, including its poor administration, its inability to fulfill its promises to the people, and a leadership that politically cannibalized itself, its coup de grace came from Beijing-authorized provincial armies that were formed and led by Han Chinese officials who were concerned about the rebellion's cultural threat. The rebellion's destruction is almost unfathomable; in the populous and prosperous Jiangnan (the Lower Yangtze) region, the population, which stood at 67 million in 1843, plummeted to 45 million half a century later.

The decades of the 1850s into the 1870s saw other areas raked by rebellions as well. The first phase of the Robin Hood-like Nian rebellion in north China (1853-1868) was primarily extended **guerrilla warfare**. Chinese scholar-officials again dealt successfully with the rebels' challenges, copying the rebels' own strategy of employing scorched earth tactics while building fortified settlements to keep rebels away from the masses. The rebellion's second phase was mostly a struggle between cavalries that ranged across the North China plain; Han officials suppressed it as well.

Two Muslim rebellions in southwest (1855-1873) and northwest China (1862-1873) had different dynamics. In the southwest's Yunnan, the key struggle (the Panthay rebellion) emerged from the treatment of Chinese Muslims (called Hui), who had for many years controlled mining in the province, by interloping ethnic Han Chinese who moved in to seize the mines. Massacre followed by countermassacre marked the bloody affair; siege warfare

**THE TAIPING PLAN FOR REORGANIZING CHINESE SOCIETY
FROM LAND SYSTEM OF THE HEAVENLY DYNASTY (1853)**

The division of land must be according to the number of individuals, whether male or female; calculating upon the number of individuals in a household, if they be numerous, then the amount of land will be larger, and, if few, smaller.... All the fields in the empire are to be cultivated by all the people alike. If the land is deficient in one place, then the people must be removed to another.... Thus, all the people in the empire may together enjoy the abundant happiness of the Heavenly Father, Supreme Lord, and Great God. There being fields, let all cultivate them; there being food, let all eat; there being money, let us all use it so that nowhere does inequality exist, and no man in not well fed and clothed.

All men and women, every individual of sixteen years and upwards, shall receive land, twice as much as those of fifteen years of age and under.... Throughout the empire the mulberry tree is to be planted close to every wall, so that all women may engage in rearing silkworms, spinning the silk, and making garments. Throughout the empire every family should keep five hens and two sows— At the time of harvest every sergeant shall direct the corporals to see to it that of the twenty-five families under his charge each individual has a sufficient supply of food, and, aside from the new grain each may receive, the remainder must be deposited in the public granary... for the whole empire is the universal family of our Heavenly Father....

....[T]he sergeant must keep an account of money and grain figures in a record book....For every twenty-five families there must be established one public granary and one church where the sergeant must reside. Whenever there are marriages, of births, or funerals, all may go to the public granary; but a limit must be observed, and not a cash be used beyond what is necessary. Thus, every family which celebrates a marriage or a birth will be given one thousand cash and a hundred catties of grain. This one rule is applicable throughout the empire. In the use of all things, let there be economy, to provide against war and famine....In every circle of twenty-five families, all young boys must go to church every day, where the sergeant is to teach them to read the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the book of proclamations of the true ordained Sovereign. Every Sabbath the corporals must lead the men and women to the church, where the males and females are to sit in separate rows. There they will listen to sermons, sing praises, and offer sacrifices to our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God.

From J. Mason Gentzler, *Changing China: Readings in the History of China from the Opium War to the Present* (New York: Praeger, 1977), 54-58.

ended in the murders of all caught inside city walls. Unlike the Taiping and the Nian, the Qing regime used their own military forces, not those under the leadership of Han civilian officials. The dynamic of the rebellion in the northwest, in contrast, was more religious/ideological, with the leaders of a New Sect charting the way. Like the Panthay, this rebellion featured vicious and brutal siege warfare. Another Han scholar-official led in quelling the movement in a bloody five-year campaign.

Efforts to Save the Qing Dynasty and the Imperial System

One impact of these devastating foreign and domestic crises facing the Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century was the financial exhaustion of the government. Already by 1850—after the Opium War but before any of the rebellions—the Qing government was taking in only about 10 percent of what it was spending. It followed that the reconstruction work after the rebellions—such as rebuilding bridges, fixing irrigation works, and reclaiming devastated farmland—could not be undertaken by the central government, but that local elites had to take over any reconstruction if it was going to occur in their areas. In other words, the crises that were wracking the Chinese state, in the end, had to be solved by Han leaders of Chinese society rather than the Manchu-led central state. Or, seen another way, the center was losing power to the provinces and localities; it was the old center-locality tension that events brought once again to the fore.

Leaders of the so-called **Self-Strengthening Movement** argued that Western technology (particularly armaments and ships) should be used to protect Chinese traditions. They argued that Western technology would serve as the techniques ("means") by which Chinese traditions, or essence ("ends"), could be protected and preserved. They did not seem to understand that ultimately the "means" necessarily affect the "ends." While self-strengthening involved a multi-pronged effort in the spheres of diplomacy, education, and technology, advances in military technology were usually taken as a measure of successful self-strengthening for they were most clearly related to defense. In this regard, the main fruits of the self-strengtheners' labor were an arsenal built near Shanghai and a shipyard at Fuzhou, one of the first five treaty ports; these institutions were established by the same Han scholar-officials who had quelled most of the rebellions. Though self-strengtheners did not call for major institutional change in the imperial government, they did establish the Zongli Yamen (Office for General Management), a kind of foreign ministry, to oversee many diplomatic, educational, and technological efforts.

The self-strengtheners continually had to fight conservatives in the imperial court who argued that contact with the West was contaminating, that Chinese traditions must be revived; these were, for the most part, men who were overwhelmed by fears of change and what that change would portend for the traditional Chinese world and their own lives.

Even as Chinese debated their proper actions, foreign threats and crises did not abate. In the twenty-one years from 1874 to 1895, China lost control of the Ryukyu Islands (Liuqiu in Chinese), Vietnam, and Korea, its three most important tributary states, that is, states that most frequently dispatched missions to the Middle Kingdom. Aggressive actions by Japan in the first and third instances and by France in the second pointed to a new wave of imperialism in the closing quarter of the nineteenth century. The losses of Vietnam to France (1883-1885) and of Korea to Japan (1894-1895) had significant national security implications.

It was the **Sino-Japanese War** that was most shocking to the Chinese: the huge land empire of China had been militarily humiliated by the Japanese, a people whom the Chinese had denigrated as "dwarf bandits." In the war with Japan, China lost the island of Taiwan, and, if three European countries had not stepped in, the Liaodong Peninsula in Southern Manchuria would have been lost as well. In 1897 and 1898, in an even more ominous development, Western nations demanded the right to "lease" areas of China for from twenty-five to ninety-nine years. Russia, Great Britain, and France queued up to "carve up the Chinese melon"—where they could extract mineral resources and build and operate rail lines.

During this crucial period, the most powerful leader in China was the Empress Dowager Cixi, who had ruled as regent for child emperors from 1861 to 1891, and after that as

a meddler in the rule of her nephew, the Guangxu emperor. Cixi was, for the most part, a strong backer of conservative political forces in the imperial government.

In the contexts of the defeat by Japan and the leasehold mania, a movement to reform state institutions emerged full-blown in the summer of 1898 after brewing for three years in the provinces. The rationale for this change was set down by scholar-official, Kang Youwei, who reinterpreted classical Confucian texts in a quite revolutionary way—all with a view of supporting radical institutional change. Gaining support from the Guangxu emperor, Kang provided the policy agenda; in the summer of 1898, in what is known as the **Hundred Days Reform**, the emperor issued over a hundred decrees calling for institutional innovations in many arenas. These included revamping the examination system and establishing a national school system; restructuring the government and abolishing sinecure posts; modernizing the police, military, and postal systems; and setting up new institutions to promote agriculture, commerce, and industry (see Box, Memorial from Kang Youwei to the Guangxu Emperor). However, the reforms thoroughly threatened the political establishment and the power of the empress dowager. Cixi therefore opposed them and staged a coup d'état, putting the emperor under house arrest and executing those reformers who did not flee Beijing in time.

Despite this failure, the reforms and their ideological base were important in China's political development. Kang's call for institutions undergirded by and infused with Western ideas began to stimulate, as nothing had before, an interest in Western things beyond guns and ships. It might be said that Kang's work began to prime the pump of greater change. Perhaps more significant, Kang's reinterpretation of Confucianism was crucial in bringing China into the modern world, in effect, undercutting Confucianism itself. Before, Confucianism had been *the* Way, an unquestioned article of faith; but Kang had turned it into an ideology among other ideologies. When Confucianism became simply an ideology, it could, for example, be seen as a tool legitimizing the elevation of certain groups (fathers, husbands, parents, elder brothers, males in general) and demeaning others (sons, wives, women in general, all children, younger brothers). Thus, though it was an unintended consequence, Kang's work was the first step in dethroning Confucianism as the unchallenged basis of Chinese culture. It was also an important precursor to the "New Policies" adopted by the Qing regime in the first decade of the twentieth century in a last ditch effort to save the dynasty.

But sadly the Qing did not move toward reform until they were pounded by one more wretched and seemingly quite insane episode. The decline of the traditional state was punctuated at century's end by the tragic **Boxer Uprising** in North China. These rebels were called Boxers because of their martial arts rituals, which allegedly brought them invulnerability. The Boxers, mostly peasant young men and women, particularly targeted Chinese Christian converts and foreign missionaries. They attacked the converts because of the special privileges that they often enjoyed and the missionaries because they refused to allow converts to participate in traditional Chinese festivals and offended Chinese customs and beliefs in other ways. Alarmed Western nations pressed Cixi to suppress the Boxers and made plans to intervene. Instead, at this time of political, cultural, and international crisis, the Empress Dowager became an active ally of the Boxers: "China is weak," she allegedly said, "the only thing we can depend upon is the hearts of the people."¹

In the end, Western and Japanese forces marched on Beijing to suppress the Boxers; and the Chinese government, in what seems an episode from the theater of the absurd, declared war on all eight nations (Germany, Russia, France, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Austria-Hungary). In the face of the Western offensive, most Boxers simply disappeared into the northern Chinese countryside, while Cixi fled to the western city of Xi'an. The foreign powers forced the Qing court to sign a peace treaty called the **Boxer Protocol** in September 1901. Of all the Protocol's humiliating provisions, the most disastrous

MEMORIAL FROM KANG YOUWEI TO THE GUANGXU EMPEROR ON REFORM (1898)

A survey of all states in the world will show that those states which undertook reforms become strong while those states which cling to the past perished. The consequences of clinging to the past and the effects of opening up new ways are thus obvious. If Your Majesty, with your discerning brilliance, observes the trends in other countries, you will see that if we can change, we can preserve ourselves; but if we cannot change, we shall perish. Indeed, if we can make a complete change, we shall become strong, but if we make only limited changes, we shall still perish. If Your Majesty and his ministers investigate the source of the disease, you will know that this is the right prescription.

Our present trouble lies in our clinging to old institutions without knowing how to change. In an age of competition between states, to put into effect methods appropriate to an era of universal unification and laissez-faire is like wearing heavy furs in summer or riding a high carriage across a river. This can only result in having a fever or getting oneself drowned.

It is a principle of things that the new is strong but the old weak; that new things are fresh but old things rotten; that new things are active but old things static. If the institutions are old, defects will develop. Therefore there are no institutions that should remain unchanged for a hundred years. Moreover, our present institutions are but unworthy vestiges of the Han, Tang, Yuan, and Ming dynasties; they are not even the institutions of the [Manchu] ancestors. In fact, they are the products of the fancy writing and corrupt dealing of the petty officials rather than the original ideas of the ancestors... Furthermore, institutions are for the purpose of preserving one's territories. Now that the ancestral territory cannot be preserved, what good is it to maintain the ancestral institutions?....

Nowadays the court has been undertaking some reforms, but the action of the emperor is obstructed by the ministers, and the recommendations of the able scholars are attacked by old-fashioned bureaucrats....Rumors and scandals are rampant, and people fight each other like fire and water. A reform in this way is as ineffective as attempting a forward march by walking backward....Your Majesty knows that under the present circumstances reforms are imperative and old institutions must be abolished,

.... As to the republican governments of the United States and France and the constitutional governments of Britain and Germany, these countries are far away and their customs are different from ours....Consequently I beg Your Majesty to adopt the purpose of Peter the Great of Russia as our purpose and to take the Meiji Reform of Japan as the model of our reform. The time and place of Japan's reform are not remote and her religion and customs are somewhat similar to ours. Her success is manifest; her example can easily be followed.

From J. Mason Gentzler, *Changing China: Readings in the History of China from the Opium War to the Present* (New York: Praeger, 1977), 86-87.

for China was a staggering indemnity to pay the cost of the war for the foreign powers that proved a crushing burden to the imperial government's already crippled economy.

The 1911 Revolution

The last decade of Manchu rule in China ended with a tidal wave of reformist and revolutionary activity, the degree and rate of which varied from place to place throughout much

of the country. The decade was marked by a surge of urban nationalism, driven by fears of national dismemberment by the British in Tibet, the Russians in Mongolia, and the French in parts of Southwest China. Chinese in various provinces rose together to try to recover "rights" taken by the imperialists through the unequal treaties and other means, especially their ownership and control of railroads. Newspapers and magazines that focused on current developments proliferated. Cities were being paved, lighted, and better policed. In them came the spiraling of wide-ranging reformist efforts to deal with social ills—opium smoking, gambling, and foot-binding. Once subordinated social groups, especially women and the youth, began to emerge as social and political players. Chinese living overseas, still motivated by native place loyalties, played an increasingly active role in China's developments, sending money for specific reformist and revolutionary goals and investing in China's cities.

In this context, the Empress Dowager moved to make major reforms. In August 1905, after an unsuccessful attempt to structure a dual modern school-traditional examination system, she ordered the outright abolition of the civil service examination—arguably the single most revolutionary act of twentieth-century China. The exam system had been the chief conveyor of traditional Confucian orthodoxy and the recruiting source for political and social elites for millennia. With the examination system gone, there was no way to promulgate an official ideology. Indeed, there was now no ideology of state in China. Furthermore, the source for the recruitment of officials and political and social elites in general was a giant question mark. There was now simply no way to stop the tides of change. Military reforms led to the founding of a modern army, the New Army, organized by longtime official Yuan Shikai, with academies producing well-trained cadets inculcated with patriotic ideas. The government departments, called Boards, in place since the Tang dynasty, were transformed into modern ministries.

Perhaps the most surprising change was Cixi's championing of constitutional government in 1908. Chinese leaders had interpreted the victory of Japan over Czarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) not only as the first victory of an Asian nation over a European nation, but also as the victory of a constitutional power over an authoritarian monarchy. In 1906, the Qing court sent missions abroad to study constitutional systems in Japan, Europe, and the United States. For the court, Japan's constitutional monarchy seemed a relevant and advantageous system for China to emulate. For one thing, it would shore up the Qing regime as it structured a more "modern" political system. While the system would set up representative bodies in the provinces and localities, where elites would presumably flex their political muscles, such a system also potentially provided a vehicle for the Qing court to regain some of the political power that had devolved to provinces and localities in the late-nineteenth-century post-rebellion reconstruction.

In August 1908, Cixi announced a projected constitutional calendar, which would be fully realized by 1917. Representative bodies at township, county, and provincial levels began to be formed from 1909 to 1913. These bodies provided forums in which to debate, demand, and legislate. Had Cixi lived, she might have been able to lead China into that new system, but she died in November 1908, a day after the death of the thirty-seven-year-old Guangxu emperor, who died without an heir. She had arranged for a three-year-old member of the royal family to succeed Guangxu. The regents of the child emperor seemed incapable of dealing with what became obstreperous provincial and national assembly elites and whose own foot-dragging on the pace of reform antagonized many Han Chinese.

Japan was not only the model for China's developing constitutionalism, but the rapidly modernizing nation was also a school for young Chinese intellectuals. China began sending students to Japan in the late 1890s, with numbers soaring from two hundred in 1899

to thirteen thousand in 1906. Students formed politically oriented associations, many of them based on provincial native place. Seeing Japan's developing modernity and its role as a growing world power in the context of China's weakness, these students asked what was wrong with China. The answer more and more frequently was "the Manchus," the ethnic group that had controlled China for over two and half centuries. Among these students, strong anti-Manchu feelings developed. In 1905, Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan in *pinyin*), a medical doctor turned full-time revolutionary who had spent part of his youth in Hawai'i, established the Revolutionary Alliance in Tokyo. It called for overthrowing the Manchus and establishing a republic. Other revolutionary organizations sprang up as well.

Motivated by anti-Manchu nationalism and a deep sense of things gone terribly wrong for the country, revolutionaries rose up in October 1911 in a series of largely unplanned and uncoordinated actions that culminated in the **1911 Revolution**. These revolutionaries were not closely associated with Sun—indeed, he was fund-raising in Denver, Colorado, at the time. Fighting soon raged between the Qing and revolutionary forces. Yuan Shikai, the founder of the New Army, emerged as power broker in the struggle. A powerful dynastic official and a Han Chinese who had faithfully served the Manchu Qing dynasty, Yuan had had no experience with and had not even announced support for republicanism in China, but a political deal committed the presidency of the new Republic to him if he engineered the Qing abdication. Part of the reasoning for acquiescing to Yuan was the widespread fear that continued fighting might tempt some imperialist powers to make hay out of the unrest for their own advantage.

The reality was that the signs of ever more threatening imperialism were everywhere. Two examples suggest the range of imperialist tentacles at that point in the early twentieth century. In the month the revolution erupted, the Chinese government defaulted on its Boxer indemnity payments. The British Foreign Office, meeting with representatives from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, agreed that in order to secure their loans, they would have to take control of crucial institutions in the Chinese government. The other example shows Western treaty "rights" in China as supreme: because an earlier agreement had declared that China could not interfere in the soybean trade, one provincial governor could not stop the export of soybeans from his province, even at a time when people were dying from famine.

The Qing dynasty abdicated on February 12, 1912, and was replaced by the Republic of China. White flags were flown as a sign that Han Chinese rule had been restored in the overthrow of the ethnic outsiders. But it was more than a "restoration." Despite the lack of major social and economic change in its aftermath, this *was* a revolution—for when the revolutionaries overthrew the Manchus, they also destroyed the imperial system that had existed since 221 BCE. The Republic of China got off to a rousing democratic start in the winter of 1912-1913 with elections to the National Assembly. Sun Yat-sen turned his Revolutionary Alliance into a political party, the Kuomintang (KMT),* or Nationalist Party, to vie with a number of other hopeful parties. Although there were gender, age, educational, and economic qualifications for voting and serving in office, the elections went remarkably smoothly, given no history of electoral government in China's past. They were ironically the high point of electoral democracy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan until the 1980s. The Nationalists won about 43

**Kuomintang*, which literally means "National People's Party," is an older form of romanization. In *pinyin*, it is *Guomindang* (GMD). Both romanizations are commonly used in scholarly writing. It was the editor's decision to use Kuomintang (KMT) to refer to the Nationalist Party founded by Sun Yat-sen in this book.

percent of the vote, a plurality among the multiple parties: they took 269 of the 596 House of Representative seats and 123 of the 274 Senate seats; they would control 45 percent of the seats in each house. Nationalist Party leader Song Jiaoren, believed to be headed to the prime ministership under President Yuan Shikai, left for Beijing from Shanghai in March 1913; but he was shot dead at the Shanghai train station.

Conferring the presidency of the republic on Yuan Shikai turned out to have been a huge mistake. Yuan was indeed concerned with modernizing the Chinese state, but he thought that a republican government was too unwieldy to produce focused modernization. Yuan targeted the republic as a system and its components for destruction. Song was simply the first hit—Yuan was implicated in his assassination.

After republican revolutionaries rebelled against Yuan in the summer of 1913 because of his other highhanded actions, the president did not slow down in his efforts to dismantle the republic. In November 1913, he outlawed the Nationalist Party. In February 1914, he abolished the representative assemblies established in the last decade of Qing rule—at all levels, from county to province to nation. Then he announced his plan to become "Grand Constitutional Emperor" and thus reinstate the monarchy and take the throne. In late 1915 a rebellion blazed up out of southwest China to move against the would-be emperor. Yuan died suddenly in June 1916 of natural causes before he could found a new dynasty, but his death plunged the young Republic into political chaos.

The Agony of Warlordism

As long as Yuan Shikai was alive, he was able to control the generals who had been trained under his command in the New Army. With his death, the destructive genie of military struggle was unloosed; the struggle among these provincially based generals, now referred to as "warlords," produced one of the most disastrous and chaotic periods in modern Chinese history.

The goal of each warlord was to take control of Beijing and its government institutions in order to be recognized as president of the Republic. Governmental institutions in the 1920s became pawns in the warlords' struggles. The concerns of civilian politicians and bureaucrats focused increasingly on keeping their positions and maintaining their own political power, frequently cultivating connections with warlords. In this context, corruption tended to become a crucial dynamic and often decided policies and elections. The most famous case was that of Cao Kun, who won the presidency in 1923 by bribing national assemblymen with \$5,000 each to vote for him. In the decade from 1916 to 1926, referred to as the "Warlord Era," the Republic of China had six different presidents and twenty-five cabinets. The high hopes of 1912 and early 1913 lay in shambles: the hopes of establishing a republican ethos—carrying the voice of the people into the institutions of government—were aborted.

Instead, it was the ethos of the military and militarization that was carrying the day; it began to emerge as a major dynamic in twentieth-century China. There was a wide spectrum of warlord types. Some probably had the abilities, character, and potential to lead the Chinese nation. Wu Peifu, for example, had a traditional civil service degree, was a graduate of the Baoding Military Academy, and was a student of the Buddhist canon and the Confucian classics. Both Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan were able reformers in the areas they held, the latter often called the "Model Governor" in Shanxi province. But other warlords were simply outrageous thugs, wreaking terror and havoc in the areas they controlled. Easiest to mock was Zhang Zongchang, the "Dog-Meat General," whose Shandong troops were

notorious for their practice of "opening melons"—that is, splitting skulls—and for stringing human heads on telegraph poles, all in order to elicit "respect" for their brutal power.

Those warlords who were serious about trying to gain national power were involved in shifting coalitions, often armed by Western nations, who hoped "their" warlord would come out on top and then offer them advantages. These coalitions fought major wars in north China in 1920, 1922, 1924, and 1925, while many smaller conflicts erupted throughout the country. These were bloody wars, not merely minor skirmishes and political posturing. For many Chinese, the main scourge of the times was what the warlords did to pay for the weapons and supplies their armies needed. One means was outright and outrageous taxation: every conceivable item, service, or situation bore extraordinarily high taxes, from consumer goods to licenses to everyday situations (getting married, owning a pig, going to a brothel). Land taxes were collected far in advance, in some areas up to a decade ahead. The other warlord strategy for getting needed money was to force farmers to plant opium, since that crop brought in huge profits. The tragic irony of this was that in the late Qing, the cultivation of opium had been eliminated in most areas. The acreage of cultivated land devoted to opium production was at 3 percent from 1914 to 1919; but it skyrocketed to 20 percent from 1929 to 1933. The Western powers that had first brought opium to China had long gotten out of the trade. In sum, the warlords, who arose in the context of growing nationalism in the early twentieth century, came to be the antithesis of nationalism. They rendered the Republic of China an empty shell.

The May Fourth Movement

In the midst of this military and political chaos emerged an intellectual and cultural revolution that would change China's political destiny. Though Confucianism in the political and educational realm had been dethroned, it retained its stranglehold on Chinese society. Confucian social bonds elevated the status and power of age over youth, of males over females. In one of his strongest metaphors, famous writer Lu Xun argued that something had to be done to awaken the Chinese to the destructiveness of traditional culture.

Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn? But if a few awake, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house.²

Now, the old verities, which formed the iron house, slowly began to collapse. Slogans like "Down with Confucius and sons" filled the press and echoed in street demonstrations. The journal, *New Youth*, which began to be published in 1915, offered a forum for students to discuss issues and called on youths to take charge of their lives and world. A language revolution was part of this **New Culture Movement**. Written literary Chinese (*wenyan*), a difficult grammatical form that was an obstacle to increasing the rate of literacy among the people, was discarded in favor of the vernacular (*baihua*), where the written language was the same as the spoken language, a style that facilitated the spreading of public literacy. Beijing University's new chancellor, Cai Yuanpei, set out beginning in 1916 to make the university the laboratory to shape the new culture. He brought professors to campus with wide-ranging ideas—from radical and liberal to conservative and reactionary—and then gave them complete academic freedom to debate all issues and possibilities for the most appropriate cultural route ahead.

The emphasis on individualism was greater in this period than in any of modern China's history; its goal was to cast off ideological shackles of patriarchy and family authority. Two imaginary characters, "Mr. Democracy" and "Mr. Science," became watchwords of the cry for progress during this time.

The New Culture Movement took place in the larger context of the **May Fourth Movement** (ca. 1915-1924), which has been called both China's Renaissance and its Enlightenment.³ The movement added a powerful political dynamic to the pivotal events of the era. Its name came from a student demonstration in Beijing on May 4, 1919, to protest the decision at the Versailles peace conference to let Japan keep the former German leasehold in Shandong province that it had taken in World War I's opening days. Japan's claim to this territory had been agreed to via secret treaties with the Allied powers during the war. China's position on the matter was weakened by the fact that the government in Beijing had itself in 1915, admittedly under duress, agreed to Japan's **Twenty-One Demands**, which gave the Japanese empire many "rights" in China, much like the leaseholds the Qing had given other nations in the late 1890s.

The Beijing demonstration of May 4, 1919, was the first salvo in a nationwide protest, which successfully pressured China's delegates at Versailles to refuse to sign the peace treaty. This political "victory" gave rise to two alternative strategies for the remaking of Chinese culture and the nation. In the struggle between the proponents of these alternatives, the May Fourth Movement would come to be shattered. One approach held that the new China could best be constructed through direct, even violent political action; its proponents pointed to the impact of the Beijing demonstration and others, especially in Shanghai, that had direct and desired political results. These proponents of political action argued that other changes, for example cultural advances, would follow once the political system was changed. They contended that unless the foundation of the current political system—warlords bolstered by imperialists—was destroyed, nothing would ever change in China because such conservative forces would always hold the balance of power and impede further progress.

Those who proposed the alternative approach contended that any meaningful political change could only be built upon cultural change, through a process that was more evolutionary than revolutionary. They argued that if the culture was not changed, then even if the current cast of political power-holders was ousted, similar groups with deep roots in traditional culture would simply take their place. This group attacked various political "isms," like socialism, Marxism, and **anarchism**, that claimed to offer overarching systemic blueprints of a holistic way out of China's predicament. Instead, led by pragmatists, they favored solutions to specific problems; in the words of Hu Shi, "liberation means liberation from this or that institution, from this or that belief, for this or that individual; it is liberation bit by bit, drop by drop."⁴ The results of this approach would be a long time coming, which seemed to many a dangerous prospect, given China's internal weakness and especially the external threats posed by imperialist nations. For many Chinese, the persistently urgent question after 1919 became how to build national power as quickly as possible so as to forestall deepening national humiliation and perhaps even dismemberment.

The Birth of the Chinese Communist Party

As the realization of China's plight became more widespread, the "ism" of Marxism-Leninism received increasing attention for its potential to deal with China's multiple problems, particularly after the successful communist revolution in Russia and the founding

of the Soviet Union in 1917. Intellectuals and journalists formed Marxist study groups in Shanghai and Beijing. Agents from the Moscow-based **Comintern (Communist International)** made contact with these groups and formally organized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in July 1921. Because of the tiny number of CCP members (only fifty to sixty in 1921), Comintern agents pushed the CCP to join with the largest and best-known "bourgeois" party, Sun Yat-sen's Nationalists, which had remained in opposition to the warlord-dominated Republic from its political base in the southern province of Guangdong. Comintern agents also met and wooed Sun, who at this point was willing to accept help from whatever source. He eventually agreed to link up the KMT with the CCP in a **united front** through a "bloc within" system, where the two parties would not combine organizationally but individual CCP members could also join the Nationalist Party. Throughout the years of the united front, the CCP was directed by the Comintern and ultimately by Soviet leader V. I. Lenin, until his death in 1924, and then by Joseph Stalin.

Comintern agent Mikhail Borodin, who emerged as a major force in these political developments, pushed to restructure the loosely organized parliamentary-like KMT on the Leninist model of "**democratic centralism.**" In this model, along which the CCP was already organized, a façade of democratic-style discussion in party ranks is trumped by the decision-making of a centralized leadership. Borodin was also instrumental in the establishment of a KMT army, the results of a realistic recognition that attaining the party's political goals in the militarized culture of the time required armed forces of its own. The party thus established a military academy at Whampoa (Huangpu in *pinyin*) near Guangzhou. Its commandant was a relatively young officer, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi, in *pinyin*), who at the time was not a member of Sun's inner circle.

While the new Nationalist Party constitution and army had Borodin's fingerprints all over them, the party's central ideology was Sun's own Three Principles of the People: nationalism, democracy, and socialism (see Box, **The Three Principles of the People, Sun Yat-sen**). The achievement of nationalism meant uniting the country by eliminating warlords and imperialists. The attainment of democracy would come only after a period of party tutelage of the Chinese masses in the ways of democracy. The specific policy aims in Sun's concept of "socialism," or as it is often called, "people's livelihood," were somewhat ambiguous. Sun did not buy into the CCP position that China's central socioeconomic problem was the uneven distribution of wealth; rather, he argued that the central problem was the "grinding poverty" of the Chinese people. His solution: equalization of land ownership (without specifics), the development of government-owned enterprises (fitting the traditional model of socialism), and a tax on the increase in the value of landed property (the "unearned increment"—since whoever owned the land did nothing to earn the amount of the increased land value over time).

By the mid-1920s, the KMT had become increasingly polarized. Rightists in the party argued that the Soviets had too much power in Chinese affairs and that the CCP bloc within should be discontinued. Leftists, on the other hand, supported some CCP social and economic aims. Sun was temporarily able to keep the lid on these differences, but his death from liver cancer in March 1925 opened the floodgates of factional bitterness. Intra-party rivalry only worsened in the aftermath of the killings of Chinese protestors by British troops in Shanghai and Guangzhou in May and June 1925, acts that galvanized the deepening sense of national peril. The country erupted in demonstrations, street marches, and some violence in their anger against imperialists. In August a leader of the KMT left wing was gunned down, with some in the party's right wing implicated. From November 1925 to January 1926, a right-wing faction met in Beijing to disparage both the CCP and the left wing; in March 1926, they held their own party congress while the CCP and KMT left wing had met separately in January. The united front had disintegrated.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF THE PEOPLE, SUN YAT-SEN (1924)

Nationalism. In view of the ruthless exploitation of China by foreign powers, China is in fact a subcolony, a status that is much worse than that of a colony....China has concluded unequal treaties with many countries all of whom, because of the existence of these treaties, are China's masters....Today our urgent task is to restore our lost nationalism and to use the combined force of our 400 million people to avenge the wrongs of the world....Only when imperialism is eliminated can there be peace for all mankind. To achieve this goal, we should first rejuvenate Chinese nationalism and restore China's position as a sovereign state.

Democracy. There is a difference between the European and Chinese concept of freedom. While the Europeans struggle for personal freedom, we struggle for national freedom. As far as we are concerned, personal freedom should never be too excessive. In fact, in order to win national freedom, we should not hesitate to sacrifice our personal freedom. The revolutionaries in Europe and America are fond of saying that men are born equal....But is it really true that men are born equal? No stretch of land is completely level; nor are two flowers exactly identical. Since there is no such thing as equality in the sphere of nature, how can there be equality among men? True equality... has nothing to do with equality of achievement; it merely means that all people in a democratic society should enjoy the same political rights.

Among the popular rights in a democracy the foremost is the right to vote...; besides the right to vote for officials, the people should also have the right to recall them.

Insofar as the enactment of legislation is concerned, the people should have the right of initiative, as well as the right of referendum. Only when people have these four rights...can they be said to have direct control over their government or to enjoy full democracy.

People's Livelihood. The purpose of social progress cannot be more than the realization of the utmost good for the largest number of people in the society, and such realization lies in the harmonization, rather than conflict, between different economic interests....

What is the basic fact about China? It is the grinding poverty of the Chinese people....The so-called disparity in wealth is really a disparity between the poor and the extremely poor, since all Chinese are undeniably poor.

Different countries have different ways of solving their land problem....The true solution of our land problem is to make sure that farmers own the land which they till; land ownership by tillers is in fact the final goal of the principle of people's livelihood. Though China does not have "great landlords" in the Western sense, more than 90 percent of the farmers till land they do not own. This is a serious problem. Unless this problem is solved, it is senseless to talk about the principle of people's livelihood.

From Dun Jen Li, *The Road to Communism: China since 1912* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969), 115-125.

Commandant Chiang, suspicious of Communist aims, struck out at Communists at Whampoa in March 1926, but he only sacked a relatively small number. Throughout the factional struggle, Stalin continued to call for the CCP to work with the Nationalists. Four months later Chiang began the **Northern Expedition**, a long-planned two-pronged military campaign (one headed to Wuhan in central China, the other to Shanghai on the coast)

to unite the country by getting rid of warlords and imperialists. When armies associated with the left (the CCP and left-wing KMT) began to mobilize farmers and workers as they reached their initial destination of Wuhan, Chiang's hostility to the Communists intensified. He took Shanghai in late March 1927, with much help from CCP-led labor unions and leftist organizations. But, in early April, Chiang had his forces attack union headquarters and leftist groups. In the ensuing bloodbath, sometimes referred to as the "**White Terror**," hundreds were killed and thousands fled in panic. Even after the Terror had begun, Stalin from Moscow claimed that although the purge showed Chiang's true political color, the CCP should continue to work with the Kuomintang left; CCP General Secretary Chen Duxiu commented that these orders from Stalin were "like taking a bath in a toilet."⁵

The KMT left wing broke with the CCP in early summer 1927, with Borodin and the other Comintern agents fleeing for their lives. The White Terror spread over the country well into 1928; it broke the back of the CCP. In the fall of 1927, there were several desperate attempts by Communists to rise up, but they were all bloodily suppressed. In August 1928, Chiang Kai-shek reached Beijing and, at least on the map, had unified China for the first time since the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916.

The Nanjing Decade

On the verge of national victory in 1927, Chiang had declared that the capital of the Republic of China would be in the central Chinese city of Nanjing (which means "southern capital") in order to be closer to his base of political power. The period from 1927 to 1937, when the Japanese invasion forced Chiang and his government to flee and abandon the capital, is known as the **Nanjing Decade**. Beijing, which means "northern capital," was renamed Beiping, or "northern peace."

Even under the best conditions, Chiang would have had to struggle mightily to overcome or even begin to solve China's many problems during the Nanjing Decade. But he had to confront extraordinary difficulties. His power lay in three positions: head of state, chairman of the Nationalist Party, and commander in chief of the army, but there were challenges to his control of all three. "Residual warlordism" remained a problem; during the Northern Expedition, Chiang had co-opted, rather than defeated, warlords. They challenged him in four wars from March 1929 to September 1930. Further, the KMT itself was not unified; it was split among factions vying for power; disgruntled party **cadres** aligned themselves with residual warlords and continued to make trouble. Chiang, who was usually called "Generalissimo" because of his command of the national army, did not firmly consolidate his power in the party until after 1935. He himself received his main backing from the Whampoa Clique, men who owed him personal loyalty from the days when he was their military commandant. The active core of the clique was an organization called the **Blue Shirts**, many of whom saw **fascism**, the ideology chosen by Germany and Italy at the time, as the way to restore China.

Another military challenge was a revived Communist movement in southeast China. From 1931 to 1937, Japan also became an aggressive military threat in the northeast—before its outright invasion of China proper in 1937. From October 1928, when he assumed power as head of state, until October 1934, Chiang's forces were involved in or on the brink of actual warfare forty-five of the seventy-two months—about 62.5 percent of the time. In 1934, six years after he had taken power, he firmly controlled just seven of the eighteen provinces; when the Japanese invaded in summer 1937, fully one-third of the provinces were still beyond Chiang's control. He thus faced huge obstacles in being able to reconstruct China in effective fashion.

Chiang Kai-shek emerged as heir to the long line of self-strengtheners, focusing on crucial infrastructure for defense and further modernization of the Republic of China. But lack of funds blocked almost all accomplishment or even significant progress; the economic difficulties confronting the government were debilitating. The worldwide depression made it especially hard to make headway in modernizing projects. Furthermore, the Republic had an insufficient and poorly structured tax base. The government gave up national claims to the land tax, since levying it effectively after so many years of war required a national census for which there was neither time nor money. So, by default, national revenues came from tariff duties (nonsensical, at a time of having to import many items to build industries) and from regressive excise taxes on commodities for which the poor had to pay a larger percentage of their income than the wealthy. By 1937, China, with a population of 500 million, had less industrial production than Belgium, which had 8 million people. "China had the same mileage of modern highways as Spain, one-third of the telegraph lines in France, and less railroad mileage than the state of Illinois."⁶

Like Yuan Shikai, Chiang saw state-building as a top-down process. He was determined to have the Kuomintang state penetrate more deeply into society than had the imperial state, utilizing a system of townships, wards, villages, and urban neighborhoods, alongside the traditional *baojia* system of group mutual surveillance. But lack of effective administration and control prevented its successful realization. In culture, Chiang attempted a return to the past, resurrecting Confucianism as part of his **New Life Movement** to revive traditional virtues and cultivate civic virtue. The Blue Shirts became his standard-bearers in the campaign of the New Life Movement, which essentially became a war against the legacy of the May Fourth Movement. The Generalissimo made it clear: "In the last several decades we have in vain become drunk with democracy and the advocacy of free thought. And what has been the result? We have fallen into a chaotic and irretrievable situation."⁷ He said it most clearly in 1932: "The Chinese revolution has failed."⁸

The Rise of Mao Zedong

Born in 1893 into a peasant family in the central province of Hunan, Mao Zedong had been a founding member of the CCP who, as a "bloc within" member of the KMT, had been active during the Nationalist Revolution in organizing peasant associations. Driven underground in the cities and to southeast mountainous areas by the White Terror of 1927-1928, the CCP rebuilt in the countryside. It was there that Mao Zedong began his rise to power within the party. He worked closely with military figure Zhu De, who built the **Red Army**. Even while most of the party was in the rural mountains, CCP headquarters remained underground in Shanghai and was run by former students educated in the Soviet Union. As traditional Marxists, they believed that the revolution would be engineered by the urban industrial **proletariat**; it made sense to them to keep the party center in the city. Mao and Zhu developed a **base area** on the border of Jiangxi and Fujian provinces. In late 1931, it became known as the Chinese Soviet Republic, or the **Jiangxi Soviet**,* in late 1931.

During this period, the CCP experimented for the first time with **land reform** and implementing **class struggle**. Given that 80 to 85 percent of China's population were peasants and that there were relatively few urban workers, Mao began to see the peasants,

*The term *soviet* is a Russian word literally meaning *council* and is used to refer to a type of political organization in which power is in the hands of the workers.

rather than the proletariat, as key to revolutionary success. For land reform, Mao divided peasants into rich, middle, and poor categories. Although the largest group by far was the poor peasants, what constituted each group varied according to locale and to the particular people who made the categories; these groupings were not hard and fast—and they were always subject to reevaluation. Once people had been labeled, land would be confiscated from landlords and sometimes from rich peasants and then distributed to poor and middle peasants and hired laborers. Obviously, the rankings turned people's worlds upside down: landlords lost all their land, while poor peasants overnight received the land resource they had never had.

But the capriciousness of class rankings and re-rankings alienated many people in the base area. The category of rich peasant was a political hot potato; it was defined in different ways, and policies toward rich peasants varied by location. In some areas, rich peasants were grouped with other peasants and seen as allies of the revolution. In other areas, they were put in the category of exploiters along with landlords. In one wave of radicalism from June to October 1933, many formerly designated middle peasants were reclassified as landlords and had their land confiscated. In another reclassification from October to December 1933, many landlords were relabeled middle peasants. In one county, out of 3,125 households, 1,512 (48 percent) were reclassified from landlord and rich peasants to middle and even poor peasants. Then early in 1934, rich peasants again fell under bitter attack. With such rapid changes, a peasant might be a middle peasant in May, a landlord in October, and a poor peasant in December—all without any change in economic status whatsoever. The confiscation of land and the reclassifications sparked frequent violence and unrest.

In the end, Mao called a temporary halt to land reform partly because it was antagonizing too many people at a time when the CCP needed all the support that it could attract, but also because of the lack of unity among the party elite. Although the CCP center had moved from Shanghai to the Jiangxi Soviet in the 1930s, the leadership remained in the hands of the USSR-trained party **cadres** and the Comintern representative assigned to China. There were other smaller communist base areas in central China that had their own programs and policies; the CCP at the time was thus not a monolithic movement, but was diverse and polycentric.

The reborn CCP frightened Chiang Kai-shek. Between 1930 and 1934, he launched five **extermination campaigns** against the Jiangxi Soviet. Three of the first four failed because of faulty and weak military strategy; the other failed when the Generalissimo had to pull out his troops in the wake of Japan's invasion of Manchuria. Only the fifth succeeded, when his forces adopted better strategy: constructing a network of roads to maintain supply lines and building blockhouses to tighten the noose around the soviet. To save themselves, about 86,000 Communists fled, on a 370-day forced march of about 6,000 miles: the fabled **Long March**. Pursued by Jiang's troops and bombers, they marched over snow-covered mountain ranges and through quicksand-like bogs. About 8,000 survived to reach **Yan'an** in Shaanxi province in China's remote northwest. En route, Mao began his climb to the top as party leader.

Once the marchers reached Yan'an, Mao admitted that the Long March and what led to it were a worse defeat than the White Terror in the late 1920s. But in orthodox party history the Long March is treated as a great victory, a verdict that came in part because of those heroes who survived the brutal natural and human forces, even though those survivors numbered less than 10 percent of those who began. For the survivors it was a story of triumph over superhuman odds, and it produced among the survivors, especially Mao himself, a sense of mission and destiny. Indeed, until the late 1990s, veterans of the Long March monopolized the political leadership of the People's Republic.

The War with Japan, 1931-1945

In contrast to the difficulties that dogged China in its efforts to build a modernizing nation state, Japan, beginning with the "restoration" of the Meiji emperor in 1868, had seemed to be almost immediately successful, industrializing rapidly and adopting a constitution in little over two decades. Already in the early 1870s some Japanese leaders had begun casting lustful eyes on the Asian mainland, in the beginning at Korea in particular. Japan proceeded to "open" Korea with an unequal treaty in 1876; and for the next eighteen years the Japanese pitted themselves against China for realizing the predominant role on the Korean peninsula. Korea had been China's closest tributary state, and China did not want to give up its long-standing interests there. Japan won control over Korea as a result of its defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Between 1905 and 1910, Japan swallowed Korea piece by piece; Korea became, along with Taiwan, another spoil of war, a formal part of the Japanese empire. Japan increased its interests on the mainland, specifically in Chinese Manchuria, with its war against Russia (1904-1905).

Japan showed its determination to move more aggressively into China proper with the Twenty-One Demands in 1915. One group of those demands cut particularly deeply into Chinese sovereignty: it required that the Chinese attach Japanese advisers to the key governmental executive, military, financial, and police bodies—in effect, making China a protectorate of Japan. Although Yuan Shikai was compelled to sign the Demands, the Japanese in the end dropped these flagrantly arrogant conditions. But Japan insisted that it be allowed to hold on to parts of Shandong province after the war, a decision, as noted above, that led to the May Fourth incident in 1919. The Japanese also pushed Koreans to move into Manchuria to increase the numbers of its people in the Chinese territory, which Japan saw increasingly as its own. Japan's objectives in the area were furthered in the 1910s and 1920s through collaboration with the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin. But the Japanese were not sure they could trust Zhang, so the Japanese military blew up his train and killed him in June 1928.

From 1928 until 1931, Chiang Kai-shek tried to expand Chinese interests in Manchuria, building railroads to compete with those of the Japanese. A series of seemingly minor incidents over water rights and boundary disputes ratcheted up tensions between Korean and Chinese farmers in Manchuria. Japanese newspapers exaggerated the importance of the incidents, declaring them examples of China's "disrespect" for Japan—which helped fuel anti-Chinese riots in both Japan and Korea. The Japanese military command in Manchuria also magnified the situation into a towering threat to the Japanese position in the area. In this frame of mind, Japanese field officers, without the agreement or even knowledge of the military authorities or the government in Tokyo, blew up a length of track on Japan's South Manchuria Railroad in September 1931, blamed it on the Chinese, and, in "retaliation," launched a full-scale military assault on the Chinese forces and quickly took full control of Manchuria.

The Chinese did not resist; appeasement of Japan was a pattern that Chiang Kai-shek would follow for six more years. The irony was heavy: Chiang had come to power riding the wave of nationalism. And he had begun to recover some unequal treaty system "rights": tariff autonomy, reduction of numbers of foreign concessions, and negotiations over extraterritoriality (finally achieved in 1943). But he was unwilling to resist the Japanese as, over the next several years, Japan established a puppet state in Manchuria (Manchukuo); attacked Shanghai for six weeks in early 1932; advanced into several provinces of Inner Mongolia; and made demands, seized territory, and took China's sovereign rights in northern China.

Generalissimo Chiang did little except to explode verbally against his own Nineteenth Route Army when it dared to resist Japan in the Shanghai attack. Chiang argued that he did not resist the Japanese because his army was not yet strong enough, and, to his mind, the CCP was a greater threat to China. According to Chiang, "The Japanese are a disease of the skin; the Communists are a disease of the heart."⁹ Obviously, a heart problem is more serious and needs to be treated first, unless, of course, the skin disease was a malignant melanoma, an apt analogy given Japan's malevolent actions in China.

Chiang's appeasement stirred a loud and vigorous chorus of dissent from all across the country—from party leaders, journalists, students, and average citizens. Jiang responded in his White Terror mode: making arrests, engineering assassinations, raiding university dormitories, and closing campuses. A government decision in December 1935, which basically handed eastern Hebei province with the cities of Beiping and Tianjin over to the Japanese, gave rise to a student movement whose protest demonstrations and rallies spread beyond cities to rural areas as well. National Salvation Associations, which were established across the nation, called for the removal of Japanese troops and puppet governments in Manchukuo and East Hebei.

In this politically volatile context a bizarre episode, the **Xi'an Incident**, occurred in December 1936. Chiang's top general, former Manchurian leader Zhang Xueliang, whose main military assignment was to keep the Communists bottled up in the Yan'an area, kidnapped the Generalissimo while he was in the northwestern city of Xi'an, which is not far from Yan'an. Zhang held Chiang until he agreed to another united front with the CCP to fend off Japan. Although after he was freed Chiang claimed that he made no such commitment, when Japan next directly challenged China in July 1937, he ended his policy of appeasement and at last resisted the outright Japanese invasion and formed, at least in name, an anti-Japanese united front with the CCP.

In the war, Jiang's government traded space for time, retreating from Nanjing, first to the nearby city of Wuhan, then to Chongqing in the far southwestern province of Sichuan, where it remained until war's end. Sichuan and neighboring Yunnan province came to be called "**Free China**," that is the part of China controlled by neither the Japanese nor the Communists and under Nationalist Party authority. Retreating along with the government were tens of millions of civilians; schools and factories were floated into the interior on barges. Though the main refugee corridor was westward along the Yangtze River, millions of others fled to the south and southwest. By October 1938, much of eastern China, containing the major industrial cities and much of the best cropland, had fallen to the Japanese army.

The Japanese invasion was marked by rampant and gratuitous atrocities to terrorize the population. The most infamous of these was the "**Rape of Nanjing**" in late 1937, during which the Chinese have estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 were killed and tens of thousands raped. In several provinces of China, the Japanese military also used chemical warfare (poison gas) and biological warfare (spreading diseases like bubonic and pneumonic plague and cholera) against the civilian population. Despite the atrocities, Chinese collaboration with Japanese military occupiers was common; although later Chinese condemned these people as traitors, those who continued to live in occupied areas had to continue with their lives in some fashion even under the Japanese sword. Not all Chinese could flee to Free China; the ill, elderly, pregnant, and poor were groups that could not easily become refugees. A national collaborationist regime was established at Nanjing in March 1940 under longtime Kuomintang leader Wang Jingwei, who had been a close associate of Sun Yat-sen. Wang came to be regarded as a national traitor by both the KMT and the CCP.

With the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States became China's ally in the war against Japan. Their joint goal was to strengthen Chiang Kai-shek's position

sufficiently to win back eastern China, which could then be used as a base from which to bomb Japan. But logistical problems were severe: Chiang's regime in remote Chongqing was cut off from its supply lifelines and had to make do with supplies and armaments that were airlifted in. Further, bad relationships between the Generalissimo and General Joseph Stilwell, the top U.S. military commander assigned to work with Chiang, helped to thwart that strategy, and Nationalist Chinese forces remained in Chongqing until the war ended in 1945 and the government of the Republic of China returned to Nanjing.

The war's legacy for China was tragic. About 20 million Chinese were killed, almost 16 million of those being civilian casualties. Scorched earth policies—blowing up dikes and bridges and destroying railroads and roads—used by the Chinese resistance to slow Japanese aggression destroyed much of the infrastructural gains that Chiang had accomplished during the Nanjing Decade.

One of the most destructive legacies of the war was a malignant inflation. Whereas prices increased about 40 percent during the war's first year, from the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, they shot up more than 100 percent each year. Thus, something that cost about 1 *yuan* in 1937 would have cost 2,647 *yuan* in 1945. Nothing erodes the political support of a people for its government faster than inflation, especially the marauding type of inflation China faced during and after the war. The inflation led to the hoarding of commodities, creating scarcities and even higher prices, corruption that reached new heights, and ravaged standards of living. But the Chinese Communists benefited enormously from the war. At war's end there were nineteen Communist base areas in North China; and the CCP governed an area that spread across roughly 250,000 square miles. Mao claimed that there were 1.2 million CCP members by the end of the war. Communist military forces had increased almost tenfold from 92,000 in the beginning to 910,00 in 1945. The war of resistance against Japan gave the Communist movement breathing room from Chiang Kai-shek's obsessive efforts to exterminate it. It also gave the CCP the time to expand its popular support in several ways: through its own nationalistic appeal to the Chinese people by fighting the Japanese; its policies of mass mobilization for economic, literacy, and other programs; and its insistence that the 8th Route Army (its main army) respect and even help the masses.

Civil War

Even before Japan surrendered, attention in China began to shift from the war to the post-war reality of an intensely polarized Chinese political world. The united front did not work effectively, especially after an incident in January 1941, when Kuomintang troops in the New Fourth Army opened fire on Communist troops, killing three thousand and wounding many more. During the first years of the war against Japan, thousands migrated to Yan'an, the CCP's base, where Mao consolidated his political and ideological domination of the party. He was formally elected Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party in 1945.

While in Yan'an, Mao also worked to adapt Marxism-Leninism to China's situation, emphasizing peasants as key to the revolution. At Yan'an, the party devised policies that would guide it for decades to come. These included the "**mass line**," a leadership style of relying on and actively using input from the masses in decision-making. The CCP under Mao also devised a strategy for the "re-education" of those party cadres who were recalcitrant to follow or who opposed the official "line." The goal was to change their minds. This involved a process called a **rectification campaign**, which included small-group sessions studying documents the party selected; writing detailed self-criticisms;

being criticized in mass meetings; and confessing their errors. If there were no confessions, the party might isolate the targeted cadres; apply various psychological pressures; and/or send the cadre to do hard labor among the peasantry. Finally, as part of the repertoire of party's strategic policies, the revolutionary roles of art and literature were defined at a 1942 forum:

In the world today all culture, all art and literature belong to definite classes and follow definite political lines. There is no such thing as art for art's sake, art which stands above classes or art which runs parallel to or remains independent of politics. Proletarian art and literature are part of the whole cause of the proletarian revolution.... Therefore, the Party's artistic and literary activity occupies a definite and assigned position in the Party's total revolutionary work and is subordinated to the prescribed revolutionary task of the Party in any revolutionary period.¹⁰

The United States attempted to mediate in the CCP-KMT dispute but to no avail; it was never an impartial broker, for it continued to aid the Nationalists with arms and supplies. When General George Marshall ended his failed mission to broker peace in China in January 1947, it was only a matter of time before the parties' intransigence turned into civil war. In one of the largest wars of modern times, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists held huge initial advantages in quantity of men and materiel: its forces numbered about three million soldiers with roughly six thousand artillery pieces; the CCP, on the other hand, had armies of about one million and just six hundred artillery pieces. The Nationalists did win the early battles in 1946; but the Communists regrouped in Manchuria, launching a campaign to isolate the major cities. Chiang then blundered badly, sending half a million of his best troops to Manchuria before consolidating his control south of the Great Wall. The Communists quickly transformed the Manchuria theater into islands of isolated KMT-controlled cities in a Communist sea. Instead of pulling out, Chiang began costly airlifts. He used, for example, his entire military budget for the last half of 1948 to supply one city for two months and four days.

By mid-1948, the numbers of Communist troops were roughly equal to those of the KMT and they had more artillery pieces, many of the new troops coming through defection or surrender and the weapons captured from the fleeing enemy. The Communist victory in Manchuria was disastrous for the KMT: Chiang lost 470,000 of his best troops, who were killed, defected to the Communists, or became prisoners of war. Essentially the KMT had lost the civil war even before the main battles shifted to China proper.

The decisive battle for central China came at the battle of Huai-Hai in Shandong and Jiangsu provinces from October 1948 to January 1949. Communist party leaders showed themselves to be superior strategists. For leadership positions and strategic advice, Chiang was partial to Whampoa graduates and downplayed the roles and views of others. In this case, he did not follow the advice of former militarily knowledgeable warlords to make a stand at a more favorable place along the Huai River. He chose instead to stand at the railroad center of Xuzhou, where his forces were exposed on three sides. Furthermore, Chiang personally insisted on directing the battle, even though he was two hundred miles away from the fighting. Communist forces annihilated Chiang's forces: he lost half a million men and almost all of his mechanized troops. By early 1949, China north of the Yangtze River was mostly in Communist hands, and in April, they took the Nationalist capital in Nanjing. Although sporadic fighting continued in the south and west until the end of the year, on October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People's Republic of China with its capital in renamed Beijing. In December, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the government of the Republic of China fled to Taiwan.

Postmortem on the Civil War

Although the military struggle was decisive in determining the outcome of the Chinese civil war, underlying political and economic factors were crucial. Chiang never attempted to reach out to non-KMT groups or to liberalize politics in areas under his authority. When the opportunity came to expand his base by joining with the Democratic League, a party formed by an unusual coalition of old line militarists and Western-style political liberals in 1944, Chiang did not even seriously consider it. Instead, he arrested or had assassinated many of its key figures before totally outlawing the Democratic League in October 1947. Chiang's government became known for its incompetence and its corruption. He may not have been corrupt personally, but many members of his family and close associates were deeply involved in graft and other shady dealings to enrich themselves.

The most crucial reason for the failure of the KMT was the ravaging inflation that undermined both the economy of the Republic and public support for Chiang's regime. By 1945, the government's revenue was covering only one-third of its expenses. Chiang's answer was simply to print more money, a "solution" that added more fuel to fires of inflation. The exchange rate for Chinese *yuan* to U.S. dollars stood at 7,000 to 1 in January 1947 and 45,000 to 1 just seven months later. Prices in July 1948 were three million times higher than in July 1937. Inflation itself was demoralizing to the Chinese people, but even more so was having "a government with neither the will nor the ability to do anything but watch over the deterioration of the nation's urban economy."¹¹ In the end, the economic collapse was total, engulfing the rural economy as well.

By late 1947 and 1948, the very fabric of rural society seemed to be unraveling. Banditry, the traditional sign of feeble political control and deteriorating economic conditions, was pervasive....Landlords fled the countryside for the relative security of walled towns....Ordinary peasants, too, abandoned the farms, becoming recruits to the growing ranks of the hungry and destitute, many of whom died in the streets and alleyways of cities....10 million people were threatened with starvation in 1948; 48 million—about one of every ten Chinese—were refugees....The most desperate reportedly sold their wives and daughters—in 1946, the price of fifteen- and sixteen-year-old girls in [Zhejiang] was said to be 4,000 yuan... "¹²

The outcome of the Chinese civil war was not only determined by KMT failures and losses; the CCP did not win the struggle simply by default. The communists were obviously successful in terms of military strategy. But that was only part of the equation that equaled victory. The main elements of its success were the party's ability to mobilize the masses to join their cause and its generally pragmatic approach in dealing with local situations.

The most important element of the CCP's mass mobilization strategy was class struggle, used in both base areas and guerrilla zones under their control. During the war against Japan, class struggle was the vehicle to reduce rents, taxes, and interest, and carry out land reform. The party sent work teams to villages to mobilize peasant associations to challenge village elites. It is clear that the "rise of peasant associations fundamentally changed rural power relations,"¹³ and won the CCP massive popular support. A second wave of mass organizing in the base areas concentrated on setting up women's and workers' associations as part of mobilizing the population for war.

Mobilizing the masses was slow and difficult work. The first hurdle for a work team sent to a village was to gain the trust of the people in a culture based on personal connections. If the mobilizers were from the village or had close ties to residents of the village, the effort would be easier. In situations in which the work team members had no connections to the village, cadres had tough, sometimes intractable problems. Mobilizers had to have networking skills and, as

a matter of course, had to spend a great deal of time winning the confidence of the community by cultivating new social ties and building grassroots networks. Only after they had succeeded in this work could they move on to mobilizing the population in various organizations for action, such as land reform.

The timing of the CCP's mobilizational efforts varied by locale. In some bases in North China, the efforts were underway by 1939 and 1940; in others, they were not begun until 1943 or 1944. In central China bases, they started in 1941. Class struggle became most tangible in the "**struggle meeting**," which was "the most intense, condensed form of peasant mobilization."¹⁴ These often-violent meetings were launched in North China against local despots by 1942, but did not begin in central China until late 1943. Party cadres targeted the village bosses and landlords and encouraged the expression (often explosion) of latent peasant anger against them, which was not easy to do. The traditional relationship between peasants and local elites, where peasants "knew their place" and were careful not to antagonize those in power, had to be overcome. Allaying peasant fears about throwing off these old relationships was a formidable task. The staged struggle meetings were pivotal in "shattering mass apathy and passivity and disrupting what former solidarity had existed among targets and community."¹⁵

In the period from 1946 to 1948, class struggle became the means to carry out radical land reform, the same policies it had attempted and abandoned in the Jiangxi Soviet. Party leaders argued that the inauguration of land reform during the civil war was important because it was the best way to mobilize the masses against attacks by Nationalist forces. When the party began the land reform campaign, a main dynamic of struggle meetings was vengeance against elites and even middle and poor peasants who had collaborated with the Japanese.

A party directive in March 1946 instructed party cadres to stay out of the land reform process and leave it to peasant associations, which could themselves expropriate and redistribute land and property; it was a policy that actually encouraged extremism among the masses, which often led to the killing of landlords and other violent acts. By 1948, the party pulled back on the "leftist excesses" that had both symbolized and encouraged the extremism that had become the hallmark of the land reform process. Party leaders wanted to move away from the frequent killings of landlords and rich peasants, from taking land from middle peasants, and from attacking commercial and industrial enterprises.

In the mobilization that occurred alongside land reform, men formed militia units; peasant associations spearheaded army recruiting; women's associations managed surveillance posts; local self-defense units transported supplies and ammunition; and cultural teams did propaganda work. The continual CCP emphasis was on the connection between land reform and mobilization of the masses in support of party policy. The process of mass mobilization brought people to the party and gave them a shared purpose with the party and its undertakings, a crucial element in the party's overall success.

Finally, an important factor in communist revolutionary success was its pragmatic strategy that varied according to place and time. One size did not fit all when it came to revolutionary strategies and approaches. Not every attempt at mobilization succeeded; sometimes the party failed. Sometimes contingencies gave the CCP their success. But, generally, when they achieved success, it came because party cadres understood the specific locale: its natural environment; its social, economic, and political structures, networks, and relationships; and its particular needs and grievances. Then, it carefully built coalitions with local leaders to mobilize the local populace on issues of significant concern and import to that particular area.

In the end, successful military and political strategies, marked by pragmatism about local situations, brought communist success. The trajectory from empire to a Republic to

the People's Republic was unpredictable and violent. Unfortunately, most of the first thirty years of communist rule in China saw a continuation of those trends.

Notes

1. Quoted in John K. Fairbank, Edwin O Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia, The Modern Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 397, 400.
2. Lu Hsun [Xun], "Preface to the First Collection of Short Stories, 'Call to Arms'" in Lu Hsun, *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 5.
3. See, for example, Jerome B. Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). Vera Schwarz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
4. Quoted in R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 176.
5. Quoted in C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 131.
6. Schoppa, 213.
7. Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 42.
8. Eastman, 1.
9. Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1980; first edition, 1946), 129.
10. Quoted in Schoppa, 281.
11. Suzanne Pepper, "The KMT [GMD]-CCP Conflict, 1945-1949" in *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 13, *Republican China, 1912-1949*, Part 2, John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 742.
12. Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 81-82.
13. Ch'en Yungfa. *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 221.
14. Ch'en Yungfa, 220.
15. Schoppa, 279.

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