

BIANCO, Lucien. *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915-1949*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971. (Chapter 1, pp. 1-26)

i. The End of a World

1789, 1917, 1949: of these three dates, the last is by no means the least important. Since the Chinese Revolution is also the one most directly relevant to human concerns in the second half of the twentieth century, we cannot avoid coming to grips in some sense with both its wider meaning and its practical bearing on today's problems. Yet at the same time the Chinese Revolution represents the culmination of a history unique to China. To study it directly as the prototype of contemporary revolution—i.e., revolution in an underdeveloped or semicolonial country—is to risk serious misunderstandings.

To assess the significance of the Chinese Revolution we need the historical background, but if we are to stick to essentials, the background must be kept simple. That is the compromise adopted here. Only the first chapter is pure narrative; it concerns the China of yesteryear (1839–1916). In this three-quarters of a century between traditional and contemporary China is compressed all of China's modern history. The men who lived through this period witnessed something like the crumbling of a world, a civilization, a *Weltanschauung*; the death of the Confucian world view, which had been accepted by virtually every Chinese whose income, upbringing, and leisure allowed him to look beyond the narrow confines of his village.¹

¹To begin this brief historical survey in 1839 (and not, for example, at the end of the eighteenth century) is inevitably to emphasize the role of imperialism. But the forcible opening of China to the West was not the sole cause, or even the starting point, of the disintegration of an Empire that, from afar, appeared immutable. On this point see Ho Ping-ti's classic work, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368–1953*

By 1916 the revolution was under way, but it would take another third of a century to finish off the old China. This period, from 1916 to 1949, is the real subject of the present work, and of every chapter except the first.² In each of the subsequent chapters an effort is made to apply a general theme to a different historical topic—e.g., a particular series of events or a socioeconomic analysis. The present chapter closes with a brief summary of the events of 1916–49. Designed to facilitate the reading of later chapters, it necessarily includes only the bare essentials needed for an understanding of the general analysis.

The Crumbling Empire

Before recent changes in the school curriculum, the Opium Wars were the gong that announced China's entrance on the stage of world history, i.e., the first mention of China in the pages of high school textbooks. In 1842, after three years of unequal combat, the Treaty of Nanking opened five Chinese ports to British trading vessels and gave Great Britain possession of Hong Kong. Eighteen years later, another war—actually a series of Anglo-French expeditions—completed the “opening of China.” The Treaty of Peking of 1860 provided, among other things, for representation of the Powers at Peking.

For the rulers of the Empire and the Chinese literati, these events were tragic beyond measure. For these men China's geographical centrality and its corollary, China's moral and cultural superiority over the rest of the world, were self-evident. In Chinese the word for China is *Chung-kuo*, the Middle Kingdom, the realm closest to the beneficent influence radiating from Heaven. Since Heaven was round and the earth was square, obviously the peoples consigned to the corners could not be as civilized and well governed as the inhabitants of the Celestial

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), and Philip A. Kuhn's recent study, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796–1864* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 1–10.

² Or more precisely, as the title of this book indicates, the period 1915 to 1949, for my real point of departure is not the political developments of 1916, but the appearance in September 1915 of the journal later known as *Hsin ch'ing-nien*, which played an important role in the intellectual history of the revolution.

Empire. (In the corners also were the four seas, which carried Western sailors to China in the nineteenth century.) A unique system governed the relations between China and the rest of the world—the tributary system. Since the radiance of China's civilization, the merit and prestige of her sovereign, were irresistibly attractive to uncivilized peoples, delegates from these peoples had to be received in Peking. These delegates respectfully presented a tribute to the Son of Heaven, who had no need whatever for it, as a sign of submission. To these subservient envoys of tributary peoples, the Emperor in return gave gifts that reflected China's greatness and wealth. This was the established mode of international trade.

No irony is intended in this description. It is no more outrageous to regard as uncivilized all those who do not live under a Confucian monarchy than it is to regard as barbarians all those who do not speak Greek. In the course of China's long history, nearly all her sustained contacts had been with less important peoples, of whom a fair number had been strongly influenced by Chinese civilization, some even to the point of adopting Chinese writing. The Empire was bounded largely by almost impassable mountains and by deserts inhabited only by nomadic tribesmen. Sinocentrism was deeply rooted in geography as well as culture.

Still reeling from the Western barbarian invasion, the Empire was almost brought down by revolutionary disturbances in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, which spread throughout the country. In 1854–55 at least sixteen of the eighteen provinces (there is some question about two provinces in the extreme Northwest) threw off Imperial rule.³ Rebellion and suppression resulted in tens of millions of deaths and left a number of provinces in ruins.⁴ Of all the insurrectionary movements,

³ That is, the provinces comprising China proper, excluding the peripheral regions of Tibet, Mongolia, and Manchuria.

⁴ There are few more striking illustrations of how narrowly focused on Europe our study and teaching of history is: most French textbooks on this period devote several chapters to the European revolutions of 1848, but only a few lines to these twenty-five years of revolution in China.

the most important was unquestionably the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), which set up a rival dynasty with a capital at Nanking. The "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace" (T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo) controlled much of South and Central China, and for a time threatened Peking and Tientsin. The extraordinary importance of the Taiping Rebellion, however, lies not only in the amount of territory it controlled and in the seriousness of its challenge to the Manchu dynasty, but also in two features that were later echoed, at least in part, by the Communist Revolution. They were the rejection of Confucianism in favor of an eclectic religion that included poorly assimilated or deliberately distorted Christian influences; and a program of agrarian communism (notably collective cultivation of the land), together with such resolutely modern social doctrines as equality of the sexes and the prohibition of concubinage, arranged marriages, foot-binding, opium-smoking, and gambling.

But apart from the fact that most of these reforms never got past the planning stage, they did not keep the Taipings from preserving and even perfecting certain features of the order they claimed to have destroyed: corruption, nepotism, faction-ridden and indecisive leadership. These characteristics both explain the ultimate failure of the rebellion and deprive it of any claim to being a modern revolution, for all that it was more than a simple jacquerie. To use a definition proposed elsewhere, let us call the rebellion a millenarian movement; in the modern era, such movements are fairly common in traditional societies that are beginning to change under the impact of such external forces as imperialism.⁵ The Taiping Rebellion had several characteristics typical of millenarian movements: a heightened consciousness of genuine ills, but only a confused notion of how to remedy them; eschatological expectations that encouraged heroism

⁵ Although it was far from the most important cause of the rebellion, the intrusion of Westerners contributed to its outbreak. Not only did the dynasty's inability to repel the barbarians undermine its prestige and show up its weaknesses; but in the South, the birthplace of the Taiping movement, a great many boatmen and dockhands were thrown out of work by the Treaty of Nanking, which diverted much of China's trade with the West from Canton to other cities.

and ruthless fanaticism (the movement had its messiah, a Heavenly King who was allegedly the younger brother of Jesus Christ); and the heralding of more fundamental changes, of better-run revolutions. The Taipings were in a sense the precursors of the Communists.

The Taipings' defeat cannot be explained simply in terms of their weaknesses. Threatened with extinction, the Empire pulled itself together. Between 1860 and 1870-75 a handful of energetic statesmen—literati and government officials by vocation, military leaders by necessity—systematically put down the rebel forces. To this end they organized new armies, which were better equipped to fight the rebels than the old Imperial armies. They also tried to consolidate their gains by reorganizing the country's civil administration. In this effort, the so-called T'ung-chih Restoration (1862-74), they took the Confucian ideal of good government as their model and tried to give new life to Confucianism, which had been implicitly challenged by the values of the Western barbarians and explicitly repudiated by the Taipings. This pathetic attempt to bring back the past and preserve obsolescent values was predestined to failure. In the short run, however, the conservative policy succeeded, thanks to the perseverance of the men behind it: order was reestablished, corruption was effectively controlled, the ruins of war were rebuilt. But the very dynamism and apparent success of this vigorous attempt at restoration may have impeded efforts to work out a more appropriate response to the challenge of the West.

This is not to say that China made no effort in this period to master some of the secrets of the new barbarians' strength. The Restorationists themselves supplemented their policy of reviving Confucianism and restoring the old order with certain Westernizing measures: building arsenals and steamships, translating European scientific and technical manuals, establishing an interpreters' school at Peking. These measures show a predilection for Western technology, and more specifically for Western armament, which had proved its importance in the Opium Wars. Imitation of the West continued long after the relatively short-

lived Restoration, but remained within the same limits, limits that were neatly spelled out toward the end of the century in the famous formula of the provincial governor Chang Chih-tung, whose enlightened conservatism made him a worthy heir to the Restorationists of the preceding generation: "Chinese learning as the basis; Western learning for practical use."⁶ Inevitably, however, the innovations introduced in one field after another tended to undermine still further the traditional values they had been intended to protect, while at the same time they were not introduced systematically enough or carried far enough to strengthen China sufficiently to withstand the threat she faced.⁷ All in all, progress was slow, results were meager, and conservative obstinacy was pervasive at the top: the Middle Kingdom's response to imperialist expansionism was utterly inadequate to the seriousness of the challenge.

A move by China's increasingly powerful rival Japan, which twice in modern times has served as midwife to its neighbor, saved China from stagnation.⁸ The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, which ended with Japan's easy but unexpected victory, forced Chinese history into a distinct new phase with a new, accelerated rhythm. Henceforth everything moved fast, very fast. There are few examples in human history of upheavals as frequent and far-reaching as those China has undergone since 1894—that is, within the span of a human life. Consider Mao Tse-tung, for example, who was born in 1893.

The rapid course of events in the seventeen years from 1894 to 1911 clearly shows the new rhythm of Chinese history. Imperialism flung itself into the assault on China; or rather, rival

⁶ In 1872, the first group of Chinese sent to study at an American university were accompanied by teachers assigned to instruct them in the Confucian classics.

⁷ Modern industry made its timid debut toward the end of the nineteenth century. The main projects were sponsored by high government officials, in accordance with the formula "Direction by officials, management by merchants" (*kuan-tu shang-pan*). The semiprivate, semipublic nature of these new businesses inhibited their development, the more so since merchants and bureaucrats were in complete accord on the desirability of periodically siphoning off profits rather than reinvesting them.

⁸ The second time (the Japanese invasion beginning in 1931 and culminating in the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45), the role of midwife would be even more decisive in the birth of the Chinese Revolution.

imperialists swarmed over China's enormous, decaying corpse. Within a few years this rush for spoils led to a daring but belated and quickly squelched effort to save the dying Empire; to a terrible upheaval, much more violent but even more out of touch with reality; and finally, after last-ditch attempts at reform, to revolution—the sudden collapse, in a matter of weeks, of the world's oldest Empire.

These celebrated events can be grouped in three phases: crisis (1894-1901), respite (1901-11), and revolution (1911-12).

We will not pause to consider in detail the concessions wrested from China by every imperialist power except the United States in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Suffice it to say that the Powers either appropriated or laid claim to much of the area along the coast, which was more accessible and more easily exploited than the interior, from the Southwest (France), through the Yangtze Valley (England) and the Shantung peninsula (England and Germany), to the Northeast (Russia and Japan). The economic grip of the contending imperialists tightened rapidly, especially in the "modern" sectors of the economy. Great Britain controlled the Kaiping coalfields, Japan the Fushun coal mines and the Anshan iron mines. Nearly every new railroad brought European and Japanese capitalists an opportunity for direct investments or lucrative loans. Whereas imports of petroleum and goods manufactured in the West (e.g., tobacco and cotton fabrics) rose steadily, tea exports fell 30 per cent between 1886 and 1905. The fears of the Chinese, whether radical reformers or tradition-bound xenophobes, proved only too justified.

"Radical reformers" perhaps best describes the unfortunate heroes of the episode in the summer of 1898 known as the Hundred Days' Reform: radical by virtue of their passionate anti-traditionalism but above all by contrast with the moderate Restorationists of the preceding generation; reformers, not revolutionaries, because they still hoped to adapt the old Imperial order, to restore its vitality without calling its existence into question, to assure its survival as an inseparable aspect of the

nation. Thus it was naturally by winning over the young Manchu Emperor Kuang Hsü that the Reformers' leader, K'ang Yu-wei, undertook to get his program adopted in June 1898. He succeeded, but only on paper, for the crude and disorganized series of decrees reforming the educational system, the economy, the administration, and the army at one stroke provoked amazement, indignation, and finally revolt among conservative scholar-officials—and a large majority were conservative. The coup that put a premature end to the experiment on September 21, 1898, did more than reassert the prerogatives of the sacred Imperial Household's two leading members, the young Emperor and his "adoptive mother," the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi; it temporarily halted the inevitable conflict between the radical minority and the body of the Establishment. The Emperor was interned and his edicts withdrawn; he never again exercised any power. K'ang Yu-wei and his leading disciple and collaborator, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, fled to Japan. Six Reformers, including the young philosopher T'an Ssu-t'ung, were executed. The failure of the Reformers, who worked from within the system, was the failure of "revolution from above," the failure of a literati clique in conflict with its own class and lacking support from any other class. China would have no Meiji Restoration; the necessary changes would have to be made in some other, more costly way. Was the Reformers' failure due to the obduracy of a ruling elite bent on preserving its sinecures along with the Confucian classics? Certainly. But it was due above all to the resilience, strength, and internal cohesiveness of traditional China.

The Hundred Days' Reform had barely ended when another crisis shook traditional China, the notorious Boxer Rebellion.⁹ But in this case traditional China rose against the scourge of the modern world—imperialism. The attack was directed first against foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians, and then against the Western diplomats themselves. The murder of the

⁹ Although the first manifestations of the Boxer movement antedate the Hundred Days' Reform, the movement reached its peak only in 1899–1900, and the diplomatic settlement that ended it was not signed until September 1901. The Boxer episode is famous in the West because of the ordeal to which Western residents of China were subjected.

German minister, Baron Klemens von Ketteler, and the siege of the diplomatic quarter of Peking in June–August 1900 are still featured in popular Western histories and films of the Yellow Peril school.

The sympathy with which Chinese Communist historians view the Boxer Rebellion can be explained largely by the Boxers' assault on foreigners and foreign influence. Moreover, unlike the Hundred Days' Reform, the movement had a popular base. The great majority of Boxers were either poor peasants, forced by two consecutive bad harvests in northern Kiangsu, the flooding of the Yellow River in Shantung, and drought in other provinces of North China to leave the land or starve, or marginal social groups (boatmen, cart drivers, and artisans, for example) whose livelihood was threatened by modern transportation and industry (e.g., the importing of cotton cloth).

For my part, I think the characterization of the Boxer movement by present-day Chinese revolutionaries as progressive, even as a forerunner of their own revolution, needs serious qualification. The movement's archaic features seem to me more striking than its modern ones. Superstitions, magic spells, trances, séances, sacred boxing (to which the movement owes its name), rituals that imparted invulnerability to the participants—all these features are reminiscent of traditional Chinese secret societies, from which the Boxers were directly descended.¹⁰ But above all, the Boxers' "anti-imperialism" was very close to traditional xenophobia, and even their popular support had serious limitations. The Boxers were frequently supported, encouraged, and even led by the most stubbornly conservative literati and government officials.¹¹ At first hostile to the dynasty like other

¹⁰ See the chapter on the Boxers in Jean Chesneaux, *Secret Societies in China: In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971).

¹¹ The massacres of missionaries in Shansi province in 1900 seem to have been largely the responsibility of the governor, Yü Hsien, who had been transferred from Shantung for showing excessive indulgence toward the Boxers. At first, the Shansi peasants responded to his incitements to murder with indifference or hostility, even when he blamed the missionaries for causing drought by offending the fertility gods. See Ng Kee-lian, "Peasants, Boxers, and Missionaries in Shansi," an unpublished paper written at Harvard University.

secret societies, the movement became openly pro-dynasty in the fall of 1899, when it formed an alliance with anti-foreign officials.¹² Thus the new slogan "Support the Ch'ing! Kill the For-igners!"

Indeed, the Court's collusion with the so-called rebellion did not end there. Hardly had the Boxer bands entered Peking when they were ordered by an Imperial edict to resist the international rescue column approaching the capital from Tientsin, and on June 21, 1901, the day after von Ketteler's death, the dynasty declared war on the Powers. Thus, at this point at least, there was no question of rebellion, as the usual name for the movement misleadingly suggests; what was involved was out-and-out war between the imperialists and the government of China, a war sought by the most tradition-bound and ignorant of the men and clans in power, i.e., the opponents of the Reformers of 1898. Happily for the dynasty, the prudent independence of the most influential provincial governors, who managed to confine the hostilities to North China, and the imperialists' patent interest in accepting the fiction of a pure and simple rebellion, gave the Imperial regime, in return for a huge indemnity, one last decade of reprieve.

The Hundred Days' Reform and the Boxer Rebellion, along with the "Battle of the Concessions"¹³ that preceded and provoked them, are the classic landmarks of the crisis of the Chinese Empire. The following decade, the 213th and last of the Celestial Empire, was much less colorful, and hence is less well known. Still, the events of this period proved very different from the expected inexorable decline, the gradual crumbling of the regime; never, in fact, had reforms been so numerous. They seemed to augur a renaissance, a start toward genuine transformation of the Empire, not the end of an era but the beginning.

In a few years, the Ch'ing dynasty moved (timidly, to be sure) toward the establishment of a constitutional monarchy,

¹² At least so far as a majority of the Boxers were concerned; a minority remained steadfastly hostile to the Manchus and even fought with those who had gone over to the dynasty.

¹³ This is the title of a 1957 Cambridge University thesis by Lo Hui-min.

undertook essential and far-reaching administrative, judicial, and fiscal reforms, created a modern army, lent its support to Chinese efforts at industrial development (notably in textiles and railroad building), and last and most important, abolished the traditional civil service examinations and laid the basis for a new educational system, one that drew more heavily on the Western barbarians than on the Chinese classics.

But these efforts came too late, much too late. Introduced under the aegis of the traditionalists (including the Empress Dowager herself), who had fought the Reformers of 1898 and then espoused, often grudgingly, the essence of their program, the reforms could all too easily be seen as further evidence of weakness, concessions forced on the regime by the pressure of public opinion. In fact this was not the case, at least not until the very end of the decade, when the revolutionaries first became a serious threat. On the contrary, it was the reforms that gave the revolutionaries their chance. The long-deferred changes that were at last introduced, or at least adumbrated, could not help but undermine the established order. Institutions of higher education that once had turned out Confucian scholar-officials now began to graduate revolutionaries. In the new army as well as the new military schools, activist groups of patriotic young officers were organized; modernizers at first, these men were soon driven by nationalism to espouse revolution.¹⁴ Chinese investment in business and industry and the particular timid pattern that Chinese capitalist ventures developed gave rise to a new class, of merchants as well as scholar-officials, whose needs and values differed from those of the old ruling class. Administrative reorganization made it possible for representatives of this emerging class, as well as the traditional gentry, to make their complaints heard. This was especially true after 1909, when the newly created provincial assemblies became natural centers of political agitation.

¹⁴ The young Chiang Kai-shek, after studying at the Paoting Military Academy near Peking, continued his military studies in Japan. At the other end of China, in Yunnan, a young man from Szechwan was also preparing himself for a military career—Chu Teh, the future commander-in-chief of the Red Army.

The assemblies called for liberalization of the regime and protested against its attempts at centralization. These attempts were essentially efforts to recapture authority that had been gradually lost to the provincial governors in the preceding decades;¹⁵ and yet centralization was indispensable to any effective reform. Soon an issue was made of the foreign origin of the dynasty, which became the target of Chinese nationalism just when its struggle to prolong its own existence had finally brought it around to working for the salvation of China herself.¹⁶

By 1910 the new voice of parliamentary agitation was merely the most obvious and in a sense official expression of opposition to the regime. Nor did the revolutionary diatribes and professions of faith appearing in Chinese newspapers published in the foreign concessions of big cities like Shanghai represent the real underground opposition. Plots were being hatched in the army and among students exiled in Tokyo; attempted uprisings were followed by attempted assassinations.¹⁷ Revolution, which no one had spoken of ten years before, was the next item on the agenda.

Revolution and the End of the Empire

No one? Not quite. Certain isolated individuals had been preaching in this wilderness of half a billion souls—first of all, of course, the man who long stood for the Chinese Revolution in Western schoolbooks, Sun Yat-sen. Small matter that the man himself, opportunistic and changeable, superficial and vague, did not exactly fit today's traditional picture of China's "Father

¹⁵ A development traceable to the Taiping Rebellion: to fight the rebels, it was necessary to organize provincial armies, which became the main support of partially autonomous regional leaders.

¹⁶ To be sure, the persistent maladroitness of the Manchu princes left them open to denunciations as foreign "usurpers" by Han, i.e. Chinese, nationalists. In April 1911, when the Prince Regent (the father of the young Emperor, who had succeeded Kuang Hsü two and a half years earlier) finally agreed to appoint a genuine cabinet, he named four Chinese ministers and eight Manchus!

¹⁷ Wang Ching-wei tried to kill the Prince Regent in 1910, escaping execution despite or perhaps because of his defiance of the judges who tried him. He thus began as a national hero the career he would end as a traitor. See below, pp. 25 and 167.

of the Republic." The important thing is that circumstances,¹⁸ along with his talents as a visionary and organizer and his revolutionary seniority, made him at once the indispensable leader and a sufficiently elusive and moving symbol to rally the majority of impatient men of good will to his standard.

These new revolutionaries came almost exclusively from China's narrow modern sector. To this social and geographic fringe belonged the potential rebels—students, officers, and merchants from the treaty ports—together with the Chinese overseas, notably the students in Japan and the Chinese emigrants scattered along the shores of the Indian and Pacific oceans. It was in Tokyo in 1905 that a group directed by Sun Yat-sen and other revolutionary organizations¹⁹ merged to form the T'ung Meng Hui (Revolutionary Alliance), the predecessor of the Kuomintang. In Tokyo, too, the journal *Min-pao* (The People), the organ of the T'ung Meng Hui, defended republican ideology and the revolutionary road against the partisans of constitutional monarchy. Japan served not only as the common refuge for opponents of Manchu absolutism and as the go-between for rival groups of revolutionaries (it was a Japanese who introduced Sun Yat-sen to Huang Hsing), but also as a model of government that impressed even the Republicans.²⁰ Finally, and more prosaically, Japanese money, arms, and advice were con-

¹⁸ He was born in a region—the delta of the Sikiang (West River), the great river of South China, close to Macao and the "South Seas"—that was more open to the world than most, to the world of the overseas Chinese and through them the Western world. At fourteen Sun was learning English and mathematics in Honolulu, at nineteen medicine in Hong Kong. After the failure of his first plot, against the provincial government of Kwangtung (1895), several of his co-conspirators were executed, but he managed to escape. A year later he was caught—in London, where he was kidnapped by the Chinese embassy. Saved by the publicity given the case by an English newspaper that had been tipped off, he became at thirty a leading figure in world politics. From then on, he roamed the world as the traveling salesman of the Chinese Revolution, seeking ideas and funds for his cause.

¹⁹ Notably the Society for China's Revival (Hua Hsing Hui), founded in Hunan province in 1903 by Huang Hsing, who became Sun's deputy in the new organization and later played a leading role in preparations for the Revolution of 1911.

²⁰ The impact of Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 on nationalists throughout East Asia is well known. Nationalism was the chief factor in the revolutionary sentiments of most of Sun's followers.

tributed to the revolutionary cause by diverse groups of patriotic Japanese, who were interested for reasons of varying degrees of purity in weakening or bringing down the Manchu dynasty.²¹

Most of the revolutionaries' financial support, however, came from the overseas Chinese and in particular from successful businessmen. For these men it had become more and more difficult to reconcile, much less equate, nationalism with loyalty to the Manchu regime. Their profession, their dynamism, the capitalist values they had adopted, all made them regard mainland China much as the colonizers of Magna Graecia must have regarded their native cities. Detached but pitying, they were by no means resigned to letting their native land sleep, a land that exile had made all the dearer to them. Hence their generous contributions to a revolutionary movement they correctly regarded as essentially a nationalist and modernizing movement.

By 1909, however, the revolutionaries' repeated failures (including, in the southern provinces alone, six poorly planned military ventures between May 1907 and May 1908) had discouraged the flow of overseas support, and Sun left to raise funds in the West. He was there when the revolution broke out. Tradition, or legend, counts the unhappy outcome of a mutiny incited by Huang Hsing in Canton in April 1911 as the tenth failure of Sun's followers. The eleventh attempt came six months later, at Wuchang, on the middle Yangtze.²² The plot was quickly uncovered. An eleventh failure? No, because the discovery of the plot (on October 9) precipitated the revolution; in trying to save themselves, the Wuchang conspirators brought down an Empire. "Double ten" (tenth month, tenth day: October 10, 1911) has been celebrated ever since as the day the Republic was born.

The rebels quickly took control of Wuchang, following the flight of the governor-general and the commandant of the gar-

²¹ They ranged from chauvinism to idealism, from the crudest expansionism to awareness of Japan's cultural debt to Chinese civilization.

²² In fact it was the doing of two revolutionary groups, one of which had very loose ties with the T'ung Meng Hui, the other none at all.

ison. Less than two months later all the provinces of Central and South China, along with the Northwest, had proclaimed their independence. Sun Yat-sen, who learned in Denver, Colorado, both that the revolt had broken out and that it had succeeded, took his time returning home. He stopped in London to try to arrange a loan (he failed) and persuade the Foreign Office to exert pressure on the Japanese not to support the Manchus, and made another stop in Paris.²³ He finally arrived in Shanghai on December 24, 1911, just in time to become Provisional President of the Republic of China, taking office on January 1, 1912, at Nanking.

What an astonishingly easy victory for the revolution—a spur-of-the-moment coup, to which everyone immediately rallied. Was the collapse of the Empire an accident, like the initial spark—the revolt at Wuchang—that set off the movement?

That so many provinces seized on the Wuchang uprising as a pretext for declaring their independence, that the revolution carried the day in so many places without a shot being fired, was certainly not a matter of chance. At the least, these developments suggest a fairly widespread hostility to the Ch'ing. In fact, hostility to the dynasty extended far beyond the small circle of revolutionaries and the handful of Republicans who followed Sun Yat-sen and others. Discontent was rife among the privileged. For the modern men (capitalists, students, officers) from which the T'ung Meng Hui and other revolutionary organizations drew much of their membership belonged to the privileged classes. Even more patently among the privileged were those who swelled the revolutionaries' ranks at the last minute. These were the traditional privileged classes: landowners, scholars and bureaucrats, civil and military officials—in short, the pillars of the Imperial regime.²⁴ To be sure, not all members of the

²³ Needless to say, the policy of the Japanese government would not necessarily coincide with that of the various groups of Japanese patriots mentioned earlier.

²⁴ This is not to suggest that the lower classes played no role in the revolution; in some areas lower-class uprisings made it possible for the revolutionaries to seize power. The lower classes were even more important in the prerevolutionary years: witness, for example, the endemic peasant agitation in the middle and lower Yangtze basin from

traditional ruling class suddenly turned against the order that had sustained them, but a far from negligible number of them did. The anti-regime agitation of these men, and the resulting tumult and disorder—particularly in Central China, where the Wuchang uprising broke out—paved the way for the revolutionaries, much as the revolt of the French aristocracy led to the events of 1789. Many a d'Eprémesnil and Montsabert could be found among the vociferous members of the provincial assemblies, and many more among the delegates of the sixteen provincial assemblies who met in Peking in February 1910 and demanded a national parliament.²⁵

But far more was involved than simple parliamentary agitation. We go on saying that the revolution broke out on October 10, 1911, at Wuchang, but did it not in fact begin the previous summer in the neighboring province of Szechwan? From the extremely serious disturbances in Szechwan (riots, then rebellion and a tax strike, and finally the "liberation" of a district), we can see what led the ruling class to oppose the Manchus. Whatever their announced purposes may have been, the Szechwanese were basically motivated by a desire to preserve or extend Szechwan's provincial autonomy and to defend local special interests. The agitation began as a "Movement for the Protection of the Railroad," i.e., the projected railroad from Hankow to Szechwan, which had been underwritten largely by local landlords and merchants. The nationalization of the provincial

1906 on; the food riots in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province, in 1910; and the tax riots in Shantung province. There was even at least one case of cooperation between workers and peasants: in 1906 the miners at Pingsiang, in Kiangsi province, joined a revolt fomented by a secret society in neighboring Hunan province whose members were mostly peasants. But almost all these disturbances were simply local or provincial responses to deteriorating economic conditions—and in many ways traditional, not to say archaic, responses. The about-face of part of the ruling class was the new and decisive fact.

²⁵ The provincial assemblies, it will be recalled, were created in 1909. [Duval d'Eprémesnil and Goislard de Montsabert led the opposition of the Parlement of Paris to Louis XVI's attempt in 1788 to impose taxes on the nobility without convoking the Estates General. As a delegate to the Constituent Assembly, d'Eprémesnil defended the nobility's privileges against encroachment from below as vociferously as he had championed them against the King; he was executed by the Convention in 1794.—Trans.]

railroads decreed in May 1911 touched a sensitive nerve in Szechwan and several central provinces; it was this move that set off the explosion. Yet this conservative and particularist movement ("Szechwan for the Szechwanese" was the rioters' slogan)—this effort to preserve a railroad company crippled by speculation, corruption, and managerial incompetence, and at bottom by the insufficiency of provincial capital—was also in its way a profoundly nationalist movement.²⁶ Private interests were being defended, but at the same time a conscious stand was being taken against imperialist expansion and a government that was "selling out the country" to foreign interests; nationalization meant the intrusion of Western capital in a business matter that should have been purely Chinese and provincial.²⁷ A stand against corruption, too, the well-known corruption of the chief advocate and architect of railroad centralization, Sheng Hsüan-huai. And soon a stand against terrorism as well, for what began as the suppression of rioting turned into out-and-out massacre. In the end, Szechwanese of different classes were united by a nationalist movement that was anti-Western in intent, anti-Manchu in fact, opposed to absolutism, and already revolutionary.

Nevertheless, the revolution was brought about by the convergence of two fundamentally different oppositions, which had little more in common than opposition to the dynasty. In short, an entirely negative goal was the chief point of agreement between the first wave of revolutionaries and those who joined the revolution on its eve.²⁸ On all other points, the insurgent officers and men at Wuchang (whose brothers had revolted and been killed in earlier, ill-fated uprisings) had nothing in common with the gentry who unleashed the agitation in Hunan. The lat-

²⁶ Han Suyin's book *The Crippled Tree* (New York: Putnam, 1965), pp. 116-41, makes clear both how complex and how extensive the movement was. The book also describes how Chinese engineers were treated, and paid, by European railroad companies.

²⁷ In that same month, May 1911, the Chinese government signed a contract with a foreign financial consortium (American, English, French, and German) formed the year before.

²⁸ Not to mention the many others, notably high officials of the Imperial regime, who joined the movement after the insurrection was over.

ter were representatives of the traditional aristocracy; the former were spokesmen for a new world. And the creatures of a new world as well, for these officers of the new army, these students returned from abroad, these businessmen from the treaty ports and overseas Chinese communities who supported the Tung Meng Hui, were not only modern, they were new: their very existence, and not just their mentality or outlook, was a new fact. They did not yet constitute a class that could challenge the old ruling class, but were at most social groups in the process of formation, groups beginning to define their identity in response to stimuli introduced into the Middle Kingdom by recent history. One such stimulus, national (as opposed to foreign) industry, had been operating in a modest way for a generation; others (the reforms effected by the dynasty itself) were younger than the century. It is not surprising that the new forces produced by these stimuli, weak and badly outnumbered as they were, could not by themselves make a revolution,²⁹ and that only the broad support of part of the traditional ruling class made victory possible. Yet that support immediately compromised the victory it had helped to win; its claims weighed heavily on the young Republic.

What were the net results of the Revolution of 1911? In the first place, there are no grounds for surprise. That the earliest and most committed servants of the revolution, like the adventitious revolutionaries who came to their support, belonged to the privileged classes—this key fact, which helped set *a priori* limits to the revolution, is in no way surprising. The Revolution of 1911 brought down the Empire, a result completely in line with the negative ends that had united the opposition. It brought no fundamental changes in Chinese society, but it paid off a mortgage. Sun Yat-sen, who ten years earlier had been regarded as an extravagant dreamer, became a great man overnight.

²⁹ The more so since one of these groups, the commercial bourgeoisie, was revolutionary only up to a certain point, as its attitude during the revolution would prove. On this point see Marie-Claire Bergère, "The Role of the Bourgeoisie," in Mary C. Wright, ed., *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 229-95.

Finally, the revolution compelled its makers to go further. For much of what it had swept away had been superficial, such as the "Manchu oppression" denounced by the revolutionaries. Some of them, following Sun Yat-sen's example, couched their nationalism in terms of opposition to a foreign dynasty as a way of playing up to the imperialist powers, whose support or at least neutrality could prove decisive. For others, no doubt the majority, anti-Manchu nationalism represented the first stage of an awakening; by distracting attention from more fundamental difficulties, it served all the better as a spur to action. When the difficulties persisted, it would be necessary to go deeper and seek the truly national causes of a national crisis, without, however, losing sight of the real enemy—imperialism. Whatever the revolutionaries may have said, imperialism lay at the heart of the first revolution, a *nationalist* revolution. Nationalism was the force that created the paradoxical unity of all participants.³⁰ If protest over the railroads has a symbolic significance, it is because railroads were the most obvious sign of the imperialist penetration of China.

Within a few brief years, a high official of the old regime first took over the revolution and then tried to restore the Empire for his own ends. This "usurper," the indispensable man behind whom the revolutionaries themselves were willy-nilly forced to rally—"the strong man of China," as the Western newspapers called him with mingled condescension and respect—was Yuan Shih-k'ai.

He was hardly a revolutionary. Indeed, he had contributed more than anyone else to the defeat and destruction of the reform movement of 1898, by putting his army at the service of the Empress Dowager against the young Emperor and the forces of reform. But he had been lucky enough to spend the last two years of the Empire in semi-disgrace. What was he, then, and what was the source of his influence? In a word, he was a man-

³⁰ The traditional privileged classes were Chinese, after all, and thus humiliated and frustrated. And for much more profound reasons than men like d'Eprémèsnil and Montsabert.

darin, a career official who in the last decade of the Empire had worked with some success to build a modern army. This accomplishment gave him a reputation as a modernist, as a man receptive to the new ideas, and its most important result was to enable him to establish a kind of personal empire. The Northern (Peiyang) Army that he had created became China's most powerful organized military force. The praetorian outlook of its generals and other high-ranking officers assured Yuan a devoted following.

The man was an opportunist. Self-interest explains the choice he made in 1898, and his conduct in the 1911-12 crisis can be accounted for in the same way. After being called on for help by the Manchus and invested with the Empire's highest military command, Yuan managed to arrange both the abdication of the dynasty and his own elevation to the presidency of the Republic. His success in these maneuvers, however, is attributable mainly to the fact that many Chinese were drawn to him as the only man who was capable of preserving a unified and independent China.

The revolutionaries were soon converted to cooperation with Yuan; they were aware they represented but a tiny minority, unknown to the peasant masses and unacquainted with their aspirations. They lacked not only mass support but financial resources: the imperialists who turned down Sun Yat-sen lent money to Yuan Shih-k'ai. Sun accordingly stepped aside in Yuan's favor on February 13, 1912, the day after the Emperor's abdication, and soon was devoting his energies to an ambitious railroad development scheme—the ideal refuge for a repentant Saint-Simonian.³¹

The Republicans nonetheless ended up in open opposition to Yuan, though only after he had consolidated his power. What is known as the Second Revolution broke out in mid-1913, following the assassination (in all probability ordered by Yuan) of

³¹ All such comparisons are made for didactic purposes only. Sun Yat-sen, for example, was not literally a Saint-Simonian, but the term economically evokes what I consider an important facet of his personality.

an important Kuomintang leader. The revolt was crushed in a matter of months. This military victory paved the way for Yuan's coup d'état of November 1913, which eliminated the Kuomintang's parliamentary opposition and such other constraints as the constitutional regime theoretically imposed. Yuan's dictatorship might have lasted longer if he had not tried to found a new dynasty in 1915. His Imperial pretensions precipitated a new insurrection, one more widespread and better organized than that of 1913. Eight provinces in the South and West had announced their opposition when he suddenly died, on June 6, 1916.

The Yuan Shih-k'ai episode was accordingly a classic effort to establish a regime identical except in personnel to the one just overthrown.³² That Yuan saw his own future and his country's in terms of the precedents of Chinese history clearly shows the limited nature of the "modernism" that so upset his conservative peers. His strength lay above all in being an energetic administrator. In this he represented a class of men (the traditional aristocracy of landlords and literati) who, like him, abandoned the crumbling Empire only to seek an immediate return to order. Yuan's success had signaled the failure of 1911. His ultimate failure confirmed the small but real extent of the revolution's success: henceforth certain traditional roads to power could not be taken.

China from 1916 to 1949: A Rapid Survey

Instead of giving the Republic a new lease on life, the failure of the "usurper" hastened its decline. With Yuan gone, there was no political figure with sufficient prestige or following, particularly among the military, to impose his authority. Nominally, the Republican regime survived; there was still a President of the Republic, whose election sometimes depended on buying the necessary votes in parliament (described by a contemporary as "a herd of pigs at the trough"), more often on the support of the political-military clique that temporarily con-

³² Despite some efforts at reform; a new dynasty would have done no less.

trolled Peking, the seat of the central government. But real power did not rest with this "government"; like its many rivals, it was in fact a regional power whose authority extended little farther than the two or three provinces around the capital.³³ As might be expected, the potentates who had divided up China were constantly at war with one another. As their fortunes waxed and waned, alliances and coalitions were made and broken. Feudal wars? Perhaps. But these great vassals recognized no suzerain and claimed no aristocratic heritage. The term used to describe them, warlords, suggests the origin of their power; they were preeminently men who owed their fortune to war.

It took less than ten years to seal the doom of the Republic; its end was clearly in sight by 1920. One of the main differences between the Republic and the Empire seems to have been precisely this regionalization of politics,³⁴ this increasing weakness not only of the central government but of the country as a whole. Some of China's well-wishers, recognizing the de facto division of the country and despairing of reunification, were driven to proposing a federalist system; provincial autonomy should be reinforced, they argued, so that it would be possible to do at the provincial level what could no longer be done nationally.³⁵ The federalist movement, though extremely fashionable at the time, had little lasting significance. But it points to a fundamental factor in the development of modern China: the importance of regionalism and centrifugal tendencies in a country as large as Europe and as imperfectly unified as France under the Old Regime.

Nevertheless, the significance of the period lies elsewhere. The much vilified warlord period, which brought the country to the brink of disaster, was also the period that gave birth to

³³ It had, however, one sizable advantage: its official standing enabled it to contract foreign loans.

³⁴ A process that began, to be sure, in the last half-century of the Manchu dynasty.

³⁵ On this point, see Jean Chesneaux, "Le Mouvement fédéraliste en Chine, 1920-1923," *Revue Historique*, No. 480 (Oct.-Dec. 1966), pp. 347-84. On the general significance of provincialism in the last years of the Empire and at the beginning of the Republic, see the conclusion (p. 382) of Yoshihiro Hatano's article "The New Armies" in Mary C. Wright, ed., *China in Revolution*.

modern China—to a new world arising from the remains of the old Confucian Empire. Two highly effective revolutionary currents emerged in the decade following Yuan's death. The first was a genuine cultural revolution before that term was invented—the May Fourth Movement, named for a student demonstration in Peking on May 4, 1919.³⁶ The second, in part an offshoot of the first, was an extreme radicalization of political life, the chief sign of which was the creation and rapid growth of revolutionary movements that planned not another 1911, not just a nationalist political revolution, but a social revolution as well. One sign of the times was that the Kuomintang, drawing a lesson from its defeat, adopted a new line.³⁷ On Sun Yat-sen's initiative, it made overtures to the new Russian revolutionary regime (Chiang Kai-shek was sent on a mission to Moscow in 1923) and adopted the Bolsheviks' organization and techniques. Before Sun's death in 1925 the old leader, as faithful to his revolutionary ideal as he was changeable in his ways of serving it, effected one last transformation of the instrument he had created; in 1924, he had the Kuomintang's Reorganization Conference³⁸ adopt the so-called Three New Policies: alliance with the Soviet Union, support for workers' and peasants' movements, and collaboration with the Chinese Communist Party, then barely three years old. Not just united but merged in a single organization, the two parties, the Communist Party and the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) that same year established a military academy at Whampoa, near Canton, to train cadres for the revolutionary army. Two years later, in July 1926, that army set out to conquer China. In this campaign, the so-called Northern Expedition, the revolutionary army scored easy victories over its disunited and hopelessly old-fashioned adversaries,

³⁶ See Chapter Two.

³⁷ The decade following the failure of 1912-13 brought the Kuomintang many disappointments, particularly from the Westerners, who continued to refuse financial aid. There were other setbacks. Sun Yat-sen established a revolutionary base in Canton and was soon involved despite himself in the local complications of warlord politics. A period of awkward collaboration with a local general (Ch'en Chiung-ming) ended when the general drove Sun out of Canton.

³⁸ See p. 55 below.

the warlord armies; and its successes strengthened the revolutionary movement that had helped to clear its path.

The Northern Expedition did not just win victories, it won *the* victory.³⁹ It put an end to one era, the warlord period, and inaugurated another, the Kuomintang period or "Nationalist interregnum."⁴⁰ It was the revenge for 1912, the posthumous revenge of Sun Yat-sen, who in his lifetime had worked untiringly for just such a Northern Expedition, a campaign to extend Canton's revolutionary regime to the rest of the country. In 1927 Sun's heir, General Chiang Kai-shek, who became commander-in-chief of the Northern Expedition after serving as commandant of the military academy at Whampoa, married Sun's sister-in-law, Soong Mei-ling, as if to bolster his claim to revolutionary legitimacy.

By this time the revolution had been shorn of its most revolutionary members, the Communists, whom Chiang attacked as soon as their joint victory was certain. The government he headed at Nanking from 1928 on was distinguished as much by its hostility to the Communists (and to workers' and peasants' movements) as by its triumph over the "old China" of the warlords. So much for the Three New Policies. I have called the Northern Expedition the posthumous revenge of Sun Yat-sen, but in fact Chiang betrayed Sun's aims in the very course of achieving them. If we wished to credit the new master of China with political views as grandiose as his ambition, we might say that if the first revolution (1911-12) was a failure, Chiang's accomplishment in the second (1926-27) amounted to an attempt to stabilize the revolution at a certain point.

Stabilization implied unification of the country, and political unification was in fact the leading concern of the regime throughout the two decades of its existence (1928-49). The Kuo-

³⁹ The Northern Expedition was essentially completed in the spring of 1927, when the revolutionary army took control of the Yangtze basin. North China would not be conquered or won over until the following year, but by 1927 the outcome was clear.

⁴⁰ This is the term used by O. Edmund Clubb in *Twentieth Century China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). Here and elsewhere in this book, Nationalist with a capital N refers simply to the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang).

mintang's primary objectives can be described as first to achieve unification (1928-37), then to defend it (1937-49).

The years 1928-37 were almost the only "normal years," the only years of peace and order, that China experienced between 1911 and 1949. The peace and order were relative, just as the unification achieved in this decade was more apparent than real; yet this was the most evident change of all from the preceding warlord era.

The warlords, of course, continued to challenge the regime and to fight among themselves. Patiently Chiang set about eliminating them from contention, one after the other, by war or negotiation. He had more difficulty disposing of the second internal threat, the one posed by the Communists, which is to say the Chinese Revolution. He did, however, contain this threat and even force it to recede; and for a time he seemed on the point of destroying it. But at this juncture a foreign enemy entered the picture and wiped out all Chiang's hard-won advantages over his domestic opponents. Japan had occupied Manchuria in 1931 and had already weakened the regime by nibbling away at North China. The deathblow came in 1937 with the Sino-Japanese War.

That this was the end was not immediately apparent; on the contrary, the regime had never been more widely accepted, its leader never more popular, than in the years of ordeal (1937-38) when the enemy seized everything in China that counted. The national government withdrew to Hankow, then to Chungking in remote Szechwan. The flight of Wang Ching-wei, who left to play quisling in the occupied zone, further enhanced the stature of the Generalissimo, Chiang Kai-shek, whose stubborn perseverance came to symbolize the indomitable resistance of the Chinese people. In these first years of the war, a nation was forged and shaped; and the "Dwarfs," as the Chinese derisively called the Japanese, were largely responsible.

Reassured of ultimate victory by the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Kuomintang allowed its resistance to Japan to slacken; better to leave to the Americans a task that was

seemingly as easy for them as it would have been exhausting for China. And better to husband the Kuomintang's strength for the great postwar confrontation already on the horizon—the settling of accounts with the Communists.

In the course of the war, the Communists had in fact grown sufficiently in strength and numbers to become serious contenders for national power. Hiroshima left the two Chinese camps face to face, but open warfare between them did not break out until 1946. Although the legal government at first had the upper hand, the advantage gradually passed to the revolutionaries; American aid and Nationalist superiority in numbers and armament did not prove decisive in a war that called into play less classic sources of strength. The Red Army paraded triumphantly through the streets of Peking in January 1949 and crossed the Yangtze in April; six months later the People's Republic of China was proclaimed.

The Nationalist regime had been founded by military conquest, and by military conquest it was overthrown. In retrospect, it seems to have been little more than a brief transition between the old Confucian order and the new order of Communist China.