

## Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shikai and Chiang Kai-shek: Towards a United Republic (1905-1928)

*Sun Yat-sen was the most prominent revolutionary in the last stages of the Qing dynasty. A staunch Republican, he was briefly elected as the Provisional President of a Republican government in Nanjing, after the revolution of October 1911, while Yuan Shikai in Beijing was appointed Premier of China by the Qing court. Sun stood aside in favour of Yuan, because he lacked reliable military support. Yuan ended Qing rule, and commenced an ostensibly Republican form of government, but soon revealed that his real ambition was to become Emperor. Yuan died in 1916, and there followed more than 10 years of repeated conflicts between competing warlords, without a central government of China. Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, and was honoured as the 'father of the nation'. Finally in 1926 Chiang Kai-shek, having created an efficient army training academy at Whampoa, launched the long-awaited Northern Expedition from the Guomindang base in Guangzhou, overcame all warlord resistance, and declared a united National government in Beijing on October 10, 1928.*

## 1. Sun Yat-sen

### 1.1 *Revolutionary leader*

In the closing years of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty, prior to its collapse in 1911-12, grudging reforms had done little to alter the essential character of Qing rule, and its top leadership at the court was still dominated by conservative Manchus. However, Chinese society underneath had changed, after more than six decades of trade and contacts with the modern West. In addition to the traditional social classes, a Chinese bourgeoisie, and factory workers in modern industries, also emerged in the cities of the treaty ports, with Shanghai as a prime example. Having witnessed foreign encroachment on China, the Chinese bourgeoisie was likely to be nationalistic, in the sense of being conscious of its ethnic, cultural, and communal separation from the foreigners. Since nationalism evolved in the West in association with the rise of nation-states in Europe, its usage requires qualification when applied to the Chinese situation. For the present purpose, it is simpler to ascribe patriotism to the Chinese bourgeoisie of this period, without having to deal with the complexity of nationalism. While the scholar-gentry, also prompted by patriotism, urged the Qing to reform, the Chinese bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was more likely to agitate for revolution, although these two groups often became mixed and indistinct. Among the most zealous revolutionaries dedicated to violent overthrow of the Qing were the rapidly rising numbers of students from China's modern schools (reaching 150,000 by 1911), and those who were studying abroad, or who had returned to China after having been educated abroad. As the country with the largest community of Chinese students overseas (reaching 12,000 in 1906), Japan was a hotbed of Chinese revolutionary activities.

Like the movements for reform, the revolutionaries organized societies with names like 'Recovery', 'China Revival', or 'Patriotic Study' and published newspapers and books to propagate their cause. They also organized uprisings that were routinely suppressed. They infiltrated the Qing's New Army, preaching revolution, and the seeds they sowed there would later to bear fruit. Naturally, the revolutionaries aroused violent Qing reactions and reprisals against them; many of them took such risks that they seemed willing to sacrifice their lives for the love of their country.

One famous example was Zou Rong (1885-1905), who was the son of a rich merchant in Sichuan. Early in his teens he came under the influence of radical publications, and later he rejected his father's plan for him to continue his education in the Classics, so as to acquire scholar-gentry or official status through examination successes. Instead, in 1902, the seventeen years old Zou went to study in Japan, where he established a reputation for making impassioned speeches, at student society meetings, on the desperate need to overthrow the Manchu dynasty in order to save China and the Chinese from being destroyed by

foreign aggression. After returning to Shanghai in 1903, he joined the ‘Patriotic Study Society’ there and published ‘*The Revolutionary Army*’. The appearance of this book caused a sensation, because it promoted freedom, equality, and restoring to the Chinese people their democratic rights, which they were entitled to have and which they had been denied by the emperor’s absolutism. It quickly sold over one million copies, as it had great popular appeal in China and among Chinese overseas. Protected by the extraterritoriality of the Shanghai International Settlement, Zou and his famous revolutionary friend, Zhang Taiyan, an editor of the popular revolutionary Su (abbreviated form for Jiangsu) Daily, were able to carry on their anti-Qing activities in Shanghai for a while. Later, the Qing negotiated with the foreign authorities concerned, who shut down the radical paper, and put Zhang and some of his colleagues in prison. Out of loyalty to Zhang, and ready to become a martyr to revolution, Zou voluntarily joined him in prison. The Qing authorities in Shanghai hired lawyers to press for the death penalty for both of them at their trial by a foreign court which, however, sentenced Zhang and Zou to three and two years of hard labour respectively. Zou died in prison at age 20 shortly before he was due to be released.

The most prominent revolutionary was Sun Yat-sen. (Sun had many names, such as Sun Wen, or Sun Zhongshan. Sun Yat-sen is a well-known transliteration of his name into English.) Sun served the cause of bringing revolutionary changes to China long enough from a leading position to be remembered and revered, after his untimely death, as the Father of the Chinese Republic. He was born into a poor tenant farmer’s family in a village in Guangdong, not far from Macau. When he was twelve, he went to Honolulu, to join his older brother who had migrated there. Even as a teenager going to school in Hawaii, he was concerned with the hard lot of the Chinese people, and wished to help them and improve things in China. When he returned home in 1883, age seventeen, he tried to help his village to improve provisions for education, health and sanitation, street lighting, and crime prevention. However, he was forced to leave his village after he destroyed an image of an idol in a temple, as a gesture against superstition. This act was reminiscent of the idol-bashing Hong Xiuquan, the Taiping leader, whom Sun greatly admired. Sun then went to Hong Kong to continue his studies, until he qualified in 1892 as an MD.

As a student in Hong Kong, he was encouraged by the workers’ anti-French patriotic movement during the Sino-French War, which had started in 1884; he saw it as a sign that the Chinese people had awakened to the danger their nation was facing, and were exhibiting solidarity in action. However, he was incensed at the Qing suing for peace when the Chinese were winning major battles on land. Consequently, he began to entertain the idea of overthrowing the Qing. From 1892, after he started to practice medicine, first in Macau and later in Guangzhou, he was engrossed with searching for ways to save China. He began to contact members of secret societies hoping to start a China Revival Society (Xing Zong Hui) with them, with the aim of ‘restoring China’ to the Chinese by ‘expelling the Tartars’ (meaning the Manchus). He was also

deeply interested in developing China economically. In 1894, he wrote a long letter to Li Hongzhang, who was then the Governor General of Zhili, offering a comprehensive plan to develop China's education, agriculture, industry and mining, commerce and transportation, through adopting Western science and technology, and management institutions. He was disappointed at Li's lack of response to his plan for making China wealthy and strong. Then came the Sino-Japanese War, and Sun felt a mixture of anger and despair at the Qing's feeble and hesitant response to the war with Japan. He abandoned any hope of reform from the Qing, which was selling out to the imperial powers and preventing China's revival. From that point onwards, he became a dedicated revolutionary, making the downfall of the Qing his top priority.

In 1895, Sun established the China Revival Society with its headquarters in Hong Kong and a branch in Guangzhou, and recruited a number of leaders of secret societies as well as patriotic students and intellectuals to join. The core members of this society, together with Sun, raised funds in Hong Kong, purchased arms and ammunitions, and recruited and trained an army to stage an uprising at a certain date. But the plan was leaked by informers and the government of Hong Kong to the Qing authorities, which sent soldiers to shut down the revolutionary organization, and arrest the people involved. Sun escaped to Japan, and the Qing branded him as a 'most wanted criminal', with a large bounty attached to his arrest. In 1896, when he was visiting London, he was kidnapped by the Chinese embassy, which tried to ship him back to China in secret. He was freed, thanks to the rescue efforts of Sir James Cantlie, who was a former teacher at Sun's medical school in Hong Kong. The failed uprising and subsequent kidnapping spread Sun's fame as a revolutionary far and wide in China, and among overseas Chinese. Before he returned to Japan, he remained in England for six months, studying intensely the institutions of Britain and other Western countries at the British Museum. What he learned during this period helped him to develop the Three Principles of the People, which became the guiding ideology of revolution he led, as we shall shortly describe.

From Japan, Sun continued to direct revolutionary activities in China through his leadership of the Han Revival Society (Xing Han Hui), which was formed in 1899 by the merging of the China Revival Society with two secret societies, the Triads and the Elders and Brothers. After a failed 1898 reform, he tried to make common cause with Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who had formed an Emperor Protection Society in Japan, and continued to preach the merit of gradual political changes, led by a constitutional monarchy under the Qing. Since Sun strove for the revolutionary overthrow of the Qing, and the establishment of China as a democratic republic, like the strong nations of the West, the differences between him and the reformers were too great for them to cooperate. Instead, the two sides competed with each other for adherents in a propaganda war using the public media.

In 1900, during the perilous time of the Boxer crisis and the imperialist nations' joint invasion of China, the now desperate Sun planned an uprising in Guangdong. A perpetual opportunist, he offered to cooperate with Li Hongzhang, the Governor General of the two southern provinces, Guangdong and Guangxi, in the hope that Li would declare the two provinces independent, because of his defiance of the court's declaration of war against the foreign invaders. At the same time, Sun also appealed to the Governor of Hong Kong, H. A. Blake, to support the independence of the 'Two Guangs'. He hoped, optimistically, that Li's move would lead to an avalanche of other provinces doing the same, and then all the provinces that broke away from the Qing would join together to form a new Chinese republic. As a back up to this scheme, he ordered his supporters in Hong Kong to purchase arms and provisions for an uprising in Guangdong. At this point, some people in Japan were willing to help Sun, including some government officials. However, a change of government leadership in Japan led the Japanese to prohibit the export of arms, and the participation of the Japanese military in China's revolutionary activities. Owing to the British government's lack of support for the idea of independence for the 'Two Guangs', and to Li Hongzhang's change towards cooperation with the Qing court to work out the terms of peace with the imperial powers, Sun decided to focus entirely on the plan for an uprising in Huizhou early in October 1900.

As the time approached, the rebels at Huizhou, with a few hundred secret society members at the core, rose to gather an army of around 20,000. They occupied a number of towns and villages for 10 days. The Qing sent a larger force to surround the rebels, who ran short of supplies of food and arms, and Sun ordered them to disperse. An attempt by a follower of Sun to bomb Li's successor to the Governor General's office failed, and the man was arrested and executed. This was Sun's second attempt at an uprising, and its failure helped the cause of the reformers of the Emperor Protection Society to win more followers, at the expense of the revolutionaries. Sun fought back. He went to Hawaii to reconstitute the China Revival Society there, and changed its name to the Chinese Revolutionary Army in order to make a clearer distinction between the two. He also attacked the reformers' proposal of constitutional monarchy in the press, and toured many cities in America to publicize the need for a democratic republic for China.

Time was on Sun's side. As China became more mired into the position of a semi-colony, and as the number of people having received a modern education or having gone abroad to study grew, more Chinese became concerned with China's fate. Consequently, the number of revolutionaries motivated by patriotism greatly increased. In 1905, Sun decided to return to Tokyo, the centre of Chinese overseas students and revolutionary exiles. He travelled by way of Brussels, Berlin, and Paris to organize the Chinese students there. In Tokyo, the Chinese overseas students lionized him, and with the leaders of the other revolutionary societies, he inaugurated the Zong Guo Tong Meng Hui (United League of China), which aimed to unite all Chinese revolutionary societies under one roof. Sun was duly elected its *zong li* (chief executive). This

society had a number of literary talents, who spread the revolutionary cause in its journal, 'minbao' ('The People'), and attracted supporters with their optimistic prognosis of China catching up, or even overtaking, the West in twenty years, if her people would embrace revolution.

At thirty-nine Sun was the most senior, famous and experienced revolutionary. He identified the traditional secret society members and the modern students, including those from modern military schools, as potential followers and recruited them energetically. Since he could not set foot inside China, he relied on his followers and the revolutionary underground there to carry the movement forward. Outside China, he travelled widely and indefatigably, between Europe, America, Hawaii, southeast Asia, and Japan, making speeches, writing for newspapers, recruiting new members, liaising with colleagues, strengthening or reorganizing existing societies, and plotting uprisings. He found the overseas Chinese communities an ever-ready source of funds for his revolutionary activities.

In addition to having an organization, Sun developed a revolutionary ideology, the "Three Principles of the People", to give more substance to his movement. The first principle, 'Nationalism' (*minzu zhuyi*), was immediately applicable to anti-Manchu rule. In a broader sense, it encompassed ethnic Chinese solidarity and anti-imperialism, although the latter element was not stressed, because the revolutionaries could not afford to antagonize the foreigners. The second principle, 'Democracy' or 'People's Rights' (*minquan zhuyi*), meant a republican form of government, with a constitution and an elected national assembly. The third principle, 'Peoples' Livelihood' (*minsheng zhuyi*) - sometimes misunderstood as socialism of the rural land redistribution kind - was meant to be a tax on the unearned increase in the value of the land through industrialization and urbanization. It was also known as 'equalization of land rights'. The government appropriation of the added value to the land would prevent speculation, besides providing it with a source of revenue. This was not a programme that would scare the rural landlords, but it was predicated upon economic development through industrialization. To realize this revolutionary ideology, Sun had a programme, and plans for action. The proposed constitutional government was to be reached in three stages because a transitional period was needed, as the Chinese people had to be educated and prepared for exercising their rights. The stages were: three years of military government, six years of 'tutelage' under a provisional constitution, and finally a constitutional government with an elected parliament and president. This government was to have five powers with built-in checks and balances: legislative, executive, judiciary, examination, and censorial.

What were the sources and inspiration of Sun's revolutionary idea? Unlike Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, the reformers and supporters of the Manchu Monarchy, Sun did not have a thorough grounding in the Chinese Classics, and thus had not developed a strong sense of loyalty to the emperor. His Chinese cultural identity was largely connected with his peasant origin, and childhood immersion in the lower-class

culture of secret societies and rebel lore, particularly of the Taiping rebellion. Having come from the southern fringe of China, where East met West (Macao and Hong Kong), and having received most of his formal education outside China, Sun was a cultural hybrid. Since modernization meant inevitably adopting or adapting Western ideas, institutions and practices, a Western education free of the preconceptions of the Chinese Classics was not a disadvantage for Sun as a modernizer. Also, unlike Kang and Liang, Sun was not a scholar, philosopher or thinker, but a man of action, a political activist with a penchant and a talent for leadership. His political and economic ideas developed through his own reading, study and observation of the institutions and politics in action in many of the countries, America and England in particular, which he had visited and stayed in. For example, the first three of the above-mentioned five powers of a government with a constitutional framework had an American model, while the remaining two had traditional Chinese roots. His *min sheng* principle was inspired by Henry George's idea for checking speculation and profiteering on urban land in industrializing countries. His three stages to constitutional government seemed to address Liang Qichao's argument that the Chinese people needed to go through a period under an enlightened monarchy with mass education, to prepare them gradually for greater political participation - but Sun dispensed with the monarchy.

After the establishment of the Revolutionary Alliance, Sun and his followers planned many uprisings with the help of many secret societies. In 1906, after the failure of one in Hunan, Sun was expelled from Japan at the request of the Qing. In 1907, Sun went to Hanoi to organize the United League in Vietnam, and to be near the border of China's southwest so as to stage uprisings in the provinces in that region. He and his chief lieutenants, Huang Xing and Hu Hanming, organized four rebellions, which were all promptly suppressed by the Qing. At the request of the Qing, the colonial government of French Indo-China expelled Sun from Vietnam. In 1908, Sun's followers led two uprisings again in the southwest of China; though these lasted somewhat longer, they also failed.

Sun was not discouraged by these failures. He looked upon these experiences as lessons to be learned. Although there were many reasons for the failure of these uprisings, such as lack of thorough preparation and insufficiency of supplies, Sun saw that as a fighting force the secret society members, being unreliable and lacking in discipline, were no match for the 'New' or modern army of the Qing. From then on, he directed members of the United League to infiltrate the New Army, and to subvert the officers and men from the inside.

Among the overseas Chinese in Singapore, Kang and Liang of the Emperor Protection Society poked fun at Sun's failed putsches in their own press. Sun's strong rebuttal in the '*China Resurgent Daily*' won him thousands of followers in Southeast Asia, where he opened many branches of the Revolutionary Alliance,

and raised a lot of money for the revolutionary cause, before he departed for Europe and America in 1909. Referring to his failed coups, Sun coined the popular slogan: 'failure is the mother of success'.

### *1.2 The issue of railway rights*

The One Hundred Days' Reform, the Boxer Rebellion, and the revolutionary movements were all varieties of patriotic responses of the Chinese people to the encroachment of the imperialist nations of the West and Japan on China, which undermined China's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and future economic development. The Chinese also responded to the challenges of imperialism, during the first decade of the twentieth century, with patriotic mass movements. In 1903, Russia's refusal to withdraw troops from China's Northeast aroused Chinese residents of Shanghai and students all over China to organize mass meetings, protesting against the Russian occupation of Chinese territory, and petitioning their government not to give in to the Russian demands. Chinese students in Japan sent a delegation urging the Qing court to fight the Russians, and offering to join a Qing force as vanguards with the student army they had organized. Being mistrustful of student activism, the Qing representative in Japan asked the Japanese authorities to disperse the student army. In 1905, a serious boycott against American goods started in Shanghai and spread to the rest of China. This movement was a consequence of the American government's refusal to revise a Sino-American treaty which forced the Qing to agree to America's exclusion of Chinese labourers as immigrants to America, and also of Chinese anger at the persecution and discrimination suffered by the Chinese in America. Pressure from the American government led the Qing to try to stop the boycott, which nevertheless succeeded in stopping the treaty from being renewed.

The patriotic mass movement that started in 1903, and which triggered an epochal change, was the recovery of the rights in connection with railways and mines, which had been conceded by the Qing to the imperialist powers. As a result of popular pressure, the Qing retrieved some of the mining districts in a number of provinces from foreign hands. Rights recovery in connection with railways did not go so smoothly.

Since the 1860s, the British had made demands on the Qing to give them permission to build railways in China, because such ventures were expected to be highly profitable. The Qing resisted the British overtures, since it was not convinced of the merits of that type of modern mode of transport. In 1876 a British firm went ahead, regardless of the lack of official Chinese permission, to construct a 30 kilometer-long railway connecting Shanghai with Wusong. Not being in a position to deal forcefully with this brazen disregard of its authority and policy, the Qing purchased the line and then destroyed it. During the 1880s, the Qing authorities, having decided that the railways were useful, started to build some lines themselves. For various reasons connected with politics and funding, progress was not rapid. By 1896, only 370 miles of railways existed in China, while there were 182,000 miles in the United States, 25,000 miles in France, 21,000 miles in Britain, and 2,300 miles in Japan.



From the time of the ‘scramble concessions’ in the late 1890s, the imperialist nations also scrambled for the right to develop railways, particularly in their spheres of influence, not only for attractive economic returns, but also to facilitate their domination of the regions concerned. They put pressure on the Qing to sign away the right to develop railways of certain areas, or to contract loans with their banks, or consortia of banks, secured on railways to be built. These contracts normally assigned the right to manage and control the railways concerned to the foreign lenders, backed by the political and military might of their governments. After the Boxer Rebellion, during the first decade of the twentieth century, many imperialist powers – Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan - built railways in their spheres of influence with utter disregard of the authority of the Qing. From 1900 to 1905, 3,222 miles of tracks were laid by these foreign powers.

Foreign control of railways in China triggered a strong patriotic reaction among the Chinese, who strove to buy back those rights given to the foreigners. Between 1903 and 1907, railway rights recovery groups, by merchants and gentry with wide popular support, sprang up in most provinces. They formed private companies to raise funds locally, through issuing bonds for the purpose of buying back the rights to develop railway lines given to foreigners, and to carry out the development themselves. The enormous passion behind the drive for private Chinese ownership of the railways in the provinces was propelled not only by the desire for profit, but also by nationalistic considerations. Apart from a handful of relatively short lines attributable to private capital, these movements did not manage to raise sufficient funds and overcome other obstacles, so as to succeed in establishing a largescale network of railways in China through private means.

In May 1911, the Qing court decided to centralize the railways through nationalization, so as to give the central government greater control over this important means of transportation, as was explained in the edict that promulgated this measure. An even more compelling reason was financial. The central government was short of money to the tune of 30 million taels, and it discovered that the railway lines run by the Ministry of Post and Communications, founded in 1906 as a modernizing measure, were making profits of 8 to 9 million taels per year. This was a welcome sum to cover a part of its fiscal shortfall. Still in need of funds, the Qing government tried to raise loans from a foreign consortium of British, American, German and French banks, using as mortgage two major trunk railway lines, which were under construction, one from Wuhan to Guangdong, and the other from Wuhan to Sichuan, both of which were to be nationalized. Nationalization in this instance meant government seizing these railways lines from its Chinese subjects, who had raised funds privately to buy back from foreign hands the right to develop these lines, and then offering them as security to the banks of the very nations that were using railways as an important tool of economic imperialism in China.

The court's high-handed disregard for the interests of the Chinese people, and for their passionate drive to regain Chinese control of these vital arteries of Chinese transport, soon led to a widespread explosion of popular anger, particularly among the people of the four provinces (Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Sichuan) through which these lines were to run. In Sichuan, where the agitations were especially fierce, shops and schools were closed, and tax payments were stopped. Tens of thousands joined mass rallies against the Qing's apparent sell-out to the foreigners. The demonstrators were not just the Chinese investors (largely local elites of the gentry-merchant type), but also large numbers of workers, students, peasants and members of the New Army. Protesting against the government's action, an army officer cut off his finger at a mass rally. A general, who ordered members of the anti-government Railway League among his troops to step forward in order to expel them, had to relent, because all of his soldiers stepped forward in solidarity with the League members. As the unrest continued into September in Sichuan, the government arrested the gentry leaders involved in the railway recovery movement. Then a great mass of people gathered in front of the Governor-General's office to petition for their release. After the people were fired upon, causing a number of deaths, the protest movement soon turned into uprisings all over Sichuan. Members of the Revolutionary Alliance took the opportunity to join the fray to set up a power base at Rong Xian.

### *1.3 The revolutions of October 1911*

The uprisings in Sichuan inspired the revolutionary and secret societies associated with Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance in Hubei to steer their members in the New Army to revolt against the Qing. Over the years, members of revolutionary societies had infiltrated the New Army, and had won the allegiance of about 5000 officers and men (about one third of the provincial armed force) to the revolutionary cause. After many meetings, the leaders of these societies decided to launch an uprising together on October the 11<sup>th</sup> in Wuchang. This city was one of the strategically located triple cities that straddled the Yangzi; it, together with Hankou and Hanyang, formed the city complex known as Wuhan in central China. Wuhan was a major centre of transportation where the Yangzi ran west to east, and where the railway from Beijing in the north (completed in 1906) was to join up with the recently nationalized railway lines, the Chuanhan west to Sichuan, and the Yuehan south to Guangdong. It was also a socio-economic hub, where radical student revolutionaries reached across to boatmen (secret societies), members of the New Army and workers in modern industries, to create a volatile anti-Qing political underground, ready to erupt.

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, the accidental explosion of a bomb in the Russian Concession in Hankou, led the Qing authority to arrest a number of revolutionary activists, who were immediately executed, and to discover at their headquarters membership registers, including names of soldiers. This forced the revolutionaries in the New Army to advance the date of the uprising to the following day, when the Eighth Engineer Battalion of

the New Army fired the shots that launched the Revolution of October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1911, the celebrated event that to the school children of future China would mark symbolically the end of Qing rule.

After the mutineers seized the ammunition depots, other New Army units joined them to attack the Governor-General's offices, causing the Manchu Governor-General and other officials to retreat hurriedly from the city, and Wuchang to fall into the hands of the revolutionaries. On October 11<sup>th</sup>, another uprising engineered by the revolutionary societies took over Hanyang. On the following day, Hankou was taken over by the troops who had mutinied. After the revolutionaries and members of the New Army took over Wuhan, they were eager to set up a government independent of the Qing. Without a senior and prestigious revolutionary leader present, they chose Li Yuanhong, a former brigade commander of the New Army, on the recommendation of the constitutionalists, to lead the new Hubei Military Government as the Military Governor. They thought it was necessary to pick someone of suitably high social standing, but they did not realize that Li was a hostile opponent of the revolution, and the constitutionalists, who managed his government, were more conservative than revolutionary. Thus the politically unsophisticated and inexperienced revolutionaries lightly threw away the fruits of the revolution they fought for.

The victory at Wuhan stimulated revolutionaries all over China to ride the high tide. They led members of the New Army, secret societies, disaffected workers, peasants, and the city poor to rise up against the Qing and to take over the government. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Hunan and Shaanxi each broke away from the Qing, and declared the establishment of a military government. Within a month of the uprising at Wuchang, 12 provinces and the city of Shanghai declared independence from the Qing. By the end of October, there were 17 'restored' provinces - meaning provinces restored to Chinese rule - in south and central China. Each of these provinces that broke away from Manchu rule created its own military government. In most of these provinces, the military governors were either leaders of the former New Army, or a prominent member of the Revolutionary Alliance, with the exception of Jiansu, where the existing Governor was persuaded by the local elites to sever his ties with the Qing, and become a new-style military Governor.

## 2. Enter Yuan Shikai

### 2.1 *Yuan Shikai as Premier in Beijing*

What was the attitude of the imperial powers to these events in China? Not surprisingly they favoured the Qing, which collaborated with them in maintaining the unequal treaty system. Soon after the Wuchang uprising, the fleets of Britain, America, Germany, Japan and France gathered on the river near Wuhan ready to intervene if necessary. Facing an avalanche of provinces breaking away from the Qing in rapid

succession, the powers affected neutrality, while helping to keep the Qing financially afloat through a loan of 3,000,000 taels provided by a consortium of British, American, German and French banks. Looking for a strongman to save the situation, the powers placed their bet on Yuan Shikai, who had organized and trained the modern Beiyang Army, and who impressed the imperialists well with his vigorous campaign against the Boxers. They strongly urged the Qing to re-instate Yuan, who had been sent home in 1909, stripped of his official posts, by the new Regent, Prince Chun, 'to nurse his foot ailment'. The real reason for Yuan's removal was partly attributable to the belated Manchu drive to transfer power, especially military power, from the most senior Chinese officials into Manchu hands, and partly to Prince Chun's personal hatred against Yuan for betraying his brother, the Guangxu Emperor, during the One Hundred Days' Reform. The Russians, on the other hand, saw the Qing's breakup as an opportunity to expand, and to strengthen their frontier with China. They accordingly sent an army to occupy various area of Heilongjian in northeast China. They also encouraged a small group of Mongol princes to declare Outer Mongolia independent, so as to create a buffer between China and Russia.

The Qing responded promptly to the uprisings in Wuhan by ordering Yinchang, the Minister of War, to despatch troops south to launch count-attacks against the rebels. Being under pressure to re-instate Yuan Shikai, the court offered him, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, the Governor-Generalship of Huguang, and ordered him to lead the Beiyang troops known to be loyal to Yuan, to suppress the anti-Qing movements. The ambitious Yuan did not find the offer enticing, and declined it with the excuse that his foot ailment was not yet healed. At the end of October, as the situation became more critical, the Qing ordered another senior northern general to speed his troops south by rail to quench the fire of revolution. Instead of doing so, he joined other commanding officers to send a circular telegram to the Qing with 12 politically sensitive demands. What these senior military officers wanted above all was to limit the power of the emperor, through setting up a parliamentary government with a constitution, an elected premier, and a cabinet, in which members of the imperial clan were forbidden to serve. Within a week, the court agreed to most of their demands. After the resignation of the Manchu Premier, Prince Chun appointed Yuan as Premier, and ordered him to form a cabinet on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Yuan accepted the position after the Provisional National Assembly in Beijing elected him Premier of China. on November 8<sup>th</sup>. By this time, Yuan had obtained control not only of the Beiyang Army, but also of the Qing military and naval forces sent to Hubei against the rebellious provinces. Having gathered a preponderance of political and military power in his hands, Yuan ousted Prince Chun as Regent. During the same month, the forces he deployed against the revolutionaries in the south took back Hankou and Hanyang, but not Wuchang. The series of developments in Beijing appeared to move China towards a constitutional monarchy, which the famous reformers Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and the constitutionalists had striven for. But the revolutionaries associated with Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance in the south still stood adamantly for the formation of a republic.

Even before the dust of the revolution settled, the leaders of the provinces that declared independence from the Qing soon felt the need to get together to form a united government of the secessionist provinces, with the ultimate aim of reuniting the whole of China. As a result, the representatives of these provinces first met at Shanghai on November 15<sup>th</sup>. Later, their parliament or congress was moved to Wuhan, where the delegates passed 'The Outline of the Organization of the Provisional Government' on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1911. After Nanjing was taken from the Qing on the same date by forces from Zhejiang, it was chosen as the seat of the provisional government, because the prestige and the symbolic significance of this ancient southern capital would make it an attractive base from which the bloc of 'restored' provinces could hope to expand. Politically, the new power holders in these provinces could be roughly divided into conservatives and revolutionaries. Among the conservatives were the constitutionalists, the ex-Qing officials, the gentry and wealthy merchants, while the revolutionaries were mainly students of the modern schools, 'returned' students from abroad, and veteran organizers of revolutionary societies. The officers and soldiers of the New Army were likely to contain elements of both. The provisional government was composed of a coalition of these disparate elements.

Towards the end of November 1911, when the delegates of the 'restored' bloc were meeting in Hankou, Yuan Shikai sent Tang Shaoyi as his representative to begin peace negotiation with Wu Tingfang, who represented the southern camp. With the support of prominent southern leaders like Li Yuanhong (conservative) and Huang Xing (revolutionary), the southern peace negotiator promised Yuan's representative that should Yuan decide to force the Qing emperor to abdicate, the post of the provisional president would go to Yuan. When the southern delegates met in Nanjing, on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, to vote for various executive officers of their government, the top post was left unoccupied, to be filled by Yuan, if and when he would 'turn to righteousness', meaning to cast his lot with the republicans. They hoped that if Yuan were to use his power to end the Qing dynasty, their side would elect Yuan, who was ethnically Chinese, as the provisional president of a China reunited as a democratic republic. Although Yuan, having the support of the generals of the Beiyang Army, was playing the Qing and the southern bloc against one another, for the sake of gathering the power to rule the entire country into his own hands, he did not jump at this offer. It was as if such a move was premature. Considering that Yuan eventually attempted to restore the traditional system of monarchy with himself as emperor, he was unlikely to be attracted by the idea of ruling as the president of a democratic republic, unless his hands were forced.

## *2.2 Sun Yat-sen as Provisional President in Nanjing*

Where was Sun Yat-sen when the revolution he had devoted his life to promoting in China was actually taking place? Sun was on a fundraising campaign in the middle of America. He was overjoyed when he read about the Wuchang uprising in a Denver newspaper on October 12<sup>th</sup>. He decided to return to China, but in a circuitous way, so as to carry out some important diplomatic work on route. Sun wanted to persuade the Western powers, first of all not to aid the Qing militarily or financially. He also wanted to appeal to the West to look upon the Chinese revolution favourably, and to win their support, political and financial, for the new regime in the south. When he reached New York on October 20<sup>th</sup>, while appealing for public understanding and sympathy for the Chinese revolution, he declared that the existing rights and interests of the foreign nations in China would be acknowledged. In London, his efforts to stop further foreign loans to the Qing bore fruit. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, he reached Paris, where he pressed the French to recognize the Chinese republic. With the revolutionaries in China sending him telegrams urging him to return with all speed, he boarded a boat in Marseilles, which brought him to Shanghai on Christmas day.

Four days after Sun Yat-sen's return, the delegates of the assembly of the 17 'restored' provinces elected Sun, on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911, as the Provisional President of the government at Nanjing. Sun was inaugurated at Nanjing on January 1, 1912, which, together with the introduction of the international solar calendar, became officially the first year of the Republic of China, rather than the traditional year of accession of an emperor. At this point, since Yuan Shikai had not seen the error of his ways, Sun appeared the most suitable candidate for this post, not only to the revolutionaries, but also to the conservative delegates - the constitutionalists and former Qing officials. Being made aware of Nanjing's earlier 'promise' to Yuan, Sun sent a telegram to Yuan on the same day when he was elected, letting Yuan know that he would be prepared to resign, should Yuan decide to forsake the Qing, and take up the presidency of a China reunited as a republic.

With Sun at the top, both the legislative and the executive branches of the provisional government were dominated by revolutionaries, members of the Revolutionary Alliance in particular. There was, to be sure, conservative participation, as Li Yuanhong, a prominent conservative, was elected Vice-President. Based on the principles of freedom, equality, and the natural human rights of the citizens, the new government promulgated many important decrees that gave the people of the country, irrespective of ethnic origins and class, the right to vote and participate in politics, together with freedom of speech, religion, publication, public gathering, and association. The use and cultivation of opium, slavery, judicial torture, prostitution, foot-binding and a number of other evils were prohibited. The cult of Confucius was abolished, and the teaching of the Classics in elementary and middle schools was dispensed with. In the economic sphere, there was a policy to protect and promote commercial and industrial enterprises, to encourage overseas Chinese to invest in China, and to revitalize agriculture. In the field of foreign relations, while seeking

international recognition of his provisional government, Sun declared that the terms of the treaties concluded between the foreign nations were to remain in effect.

### *2.3 Yuan brings the Qing dynasty to an end*

At this point China had two governments: a monarchy in the north and a republic in the south, both claiming to represent China. The powers, being partial to the Qing under Premier Yuan Shikai, made no move to recognize the government under President Sun Yat-sen in Nanjing. At the top of the agenda for both was the task of reuniting China under one central government, avoiding civil war and foreign intervention while doing so, if possible.

At the beginning of 1912, Yuan Shikai did not react positively to Sun's offer to resign in his favour if he would lead China as a republic; instead, he acted like someone whose ambition had been thwarted by Sun Yat-sen's sudden ascent. As soon as Sun took office, Yuan promptly broke off the peace negotiation with the south, and instigated forty senior officers of the Beiyang Army to call publicly for maintaining the constitutional monarchy, and to express their opposition to a republican form of government. On January 11, Sun decided to lead an army northward against Yuan. Though Sun scored some military successes at the beginning, he was seriously hampered by the fact that he did not have the power to command a united army. The different army units he pulled together were controlled by those who owed him, an outsider, little loyalty, and who might not even share his objective of trying to unite China by force. In contrast, his opponent, Yuan Shikai, had the entire Beiyang army under his control. Most of the conservatives, and a majority of the Revolutionary Alliance members, preferred to work out some compromises with Yuan Shikai, rather than insisting on a military solution. They recognized Yuan as the one man who could lead a reunited China at that point in time. Had Sun been a seasoned military commander with a powerful army under his control (like Oliver Cromwell of seventeenth century England) the history of modern China might have been very different.

Besides Sun's difficulty in getting the army to do his bidding, the financially strained provisional government was having difficulty covering its own administrative expenses, let alone paying the soldiers. Also at this point, the imperialist nations, from whom Sun desired recognition and financial support for his government, were putting pressure on him to restore peace with Yuan. Facing these insurmountable obstacles, Sun decided to negotiate with Yuan for a peaceful solution, which would amount to Sun vacating his office, and letting Yuan take his place. Sun agreed to do so, on the condition that China must be reunited under a republican form of government. The acceptance of this condition by Yuan meant the end of the Qing dynasty. On January 14, 1912, Yuan asked Tang Shaoyi to find out whether Sun would actually give up his post, and whether the parliament of the provisional government at Nanjing would really elect him as

President, if Emperor Xuantong were to abdicate. On receiving a strong affirmative answer from Sun and his colleagues, Yuan promptly began the process of ending the Qing rule.

Since Yuan Shikai had forced the Regent to resign soon after he became Premier, the 5 year old Emperor Xuantong's mother, the Dowager Empress Longyu, managed the affairs of the state, sitting behind a screen, like the deceased Dowager Empress Cixi, but with little of her predecessor's power, because Yuan totally dominated the government at Beijing. On January 16, Yuan went to court to address a memorial to Dowager Empress Longyu on the matter of bringing about a republican form of government. He followed this move with bribing a eunuch to intimidate her. While waiting for her response, Yuan prompted a group of senior officers of the Beiyang Army to send, on January 26<sup>th</sup>, a memorial by telegram to the Beijing government, denouncing certain members of the imperial clan for opposing republicanism, and demanding a republican form of government for China. From around the time when Yuan started his aggressive pro-republic campaign at the court, there had been a series of assassination attempts on the lives of Manchu princes and other high Beijing officials by some revolutionaries. During the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, a bomb planted by a revolutionary killed the Deputy Chief of Staff, a princely Manchu hardliner on the preservation of Manchu imperial rule. Although Yuan was not behind these acts of violence - he nearly became a victim on one occasion - they created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear in Beijing, that helped Yuan's cause. In a desperate attempt win over Yuan's support for the dynasty, Dowager Empress Longyu offered to ennoble Yuan as marquis of the first class, but Yuan refused the offer. Then Yuan got a group of people to organize an association agitating for China to become a republic, and at the same time, pressed the throne personally to settle the matter regarding the form of China's government quickly. Finally, concerned for the personal safety of the members of the imperial clan, and of herself and her son, and being powerless to resist Yuan's demand, the hapless Dowager Empress Longyu agreed to the abdication of Emperor Xuantong, after Yuan assured her of the personal safety and financial security of the emperor and his family.

Having obtained the desired response from the court, Yuan and the parliament of the provisional government at Nanjing agreed to guarantee the right of the boy emperor and his family to continue to reside at the Forbidden City, with a maintenance grant of 4 million taels per annum, and the ownership of the imperial treasures. Yuan also satisfied the court's demand on protecting the ancestral temples of the Manchu imperial clan after the end of its rule. Following the conclusion of a negotiated settlement with Yuan and the Nanjing government based on the above-mentioned terms, the court announced, on February 2, 1912, the abdication of Emperor Xuantong, together with a final edict giving Yuan complete authority 'to organize a provisional republican government', and to unite with the anti-imperialist forces in southern and central China to achieve national unity.



Preparing to accept the offer to lead a Chinese republic, Yuan declared that the republican form of government was the best, and China was never to have monarchical rule again. On February 13, Sun Yat-sen resigned from the provisional presidency, and recommended Yuan Shikai as his replacement. On the same day, the Provisional Parliament voted unanimously for Yuan Shikai as the Provisional President. It also voted, on Sun's suggestion, to establish the capital of the reunited country at Nanjing, in order to restrain Yuan, should he abuse his power. Yuan was not happy with the idea of basing his government in a city and a region where he had few political connections. He instigated a mutiny by one unit of the Beiyang Army, and used it as an excuse for not coming south. In collusion with Yuan, the powers began to move troops towards Beijing, creating a tense situation in the north. In the end, Sun had to give in to Yuan, whose inauguration took place on March 10<sup>th</sup> at Beijing. On March 11, Sun made another effort to tie Yuan's hands by rushing through parliament the 'Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China', that laid down the laws for setting up and operating the democratic institutions of the new republican government, which was to be run largely by elected officers. There were rules for holding elections for the representatives of the people for the provincial assemblies and the national parliament, as well for the president. It also spelt out in detail the democratic rights to be enjoyed, on the basis of equality, by the Han as well as the minority ethnic groups in China. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Nanjing Parliament voted to move the provisional government to Beijing, with Yuan Shikai presiding as the President and Tang Shaoyi as the Premier of the reunited China, governed as a republic.

Thus the 268-year rule of the Qing dynasty expired with remarkably little violence. Because the dynasty's sickness had already begun early in the nineteenth century, it suffered a lingering, slow and prolonged death. From a point of view of population and resources, the Qing was a victim of its own success. During the halcyon days of the Kang-Qing age of prosperity, the population of China grew so large that the pre-industrial economy of the nineteenth century China could no longer comfortably support a population of over 400 million, without revolutionary changes. Most dynasties in China were destroyed either by external invaders or by internal rebels, after they had declined or become weakened internally. In practice, the Chinese people accepted a dynasty's mandate or acquiesced in its rule if the rulers could keep the country secure from foreign invaders, and free of internal disorder. From its declining years, say from the 1800s, Qing survived over a century of internal insurrections, even the formidable Taiping rebellion, largely because it had the support of the Chinese scholar-gentry. Its mandate was slipping away after the foreign invasions began from the 1840s. The continuous imperialist pressure, and the Qing's inability to protect the country and its people, blow by blow over seven decades of imperialist encroachment and exploitation since that time, led the Manchu dynasty to lose the support of major segments of its people, and their acquiescence to its rule. The fact that the Manchu rulers were foreign did not help their cause, because during the last decade of the Qing rule, the people of China were consumed by patriotism, or a nationalism stimulated by

imperialism. Not only the revolutionaries and Boxers were anti-Qing; even the scholar-gentry and merchants, who normally supported the Qing, were finally alienated by the dynasty's apparent collusion with the imperialists, and its last-ditch attempt to concentrate power into the hands of the Manchus, especially the imperial clansmen.

The passing of the Qing also brought to an end the Chinese dynasties of hereditary rulers, the Sons of Heaven, God-like emperors, governing with the divinely sanctioned Mandate of Heaven, which had commenced over two thousand years ago. Influenced by post-Enlightenment political ideas, and models of government enjoyed by the strong nations of the modern West, educated Chinese had resolutely turned away from their monarchical tradition as being pre-modern, a relic of the past, and insisted now on a republican form of government, even as Yuan Shikai was endeavouring to restore the monarchy.

### 3. China's Short-lived First Republic

#### 3.1 *Yuan Shi-kai's autocratic ambition; the formation of the Guomindang*

Yuan Shi-kai accepted the position of the provisional president of the Republic of China out of opportunism, as it was the highest political office of the land. He was not a convert to republicanism even though he paid lip service to it. Yuan neither understood, nor wished to operate within, a system where the law was supreme, and placed limits on the power of the head of the government. It was a misfortune for China that the highest political office that the young republic could offer did not satisfy its incumbent's appetite for power. Yuan had the opportunity to lead a reunited China, and to make the country strong and prosperous as a parliamentary democracy, governed by the institutions and laws prescribed by a constitution that placed checks and limitations on the power of the president, and divided the authority to govern the country between the different branches of the government. Instead, he devoted himself to turning China back into an autocracy, the only kind of governance he understood, and intended to preside over. Soon after he took office, he set about dismantling and destroying the fragile democratic institutions that were being established. He did not stop, even after he had gathered all civil and military authority into his own hands, until he had achieved his ambition of becoming the emperor of a new dynasty.

As soon as President Yuan assumed office on March 13, 1912, he recommended his old friend, Tang Shaoyi, to serve as Premier leading a cabinet of ten ministers. Although Yuan's men got the most powerful posts in the Tang cabinet, such as the Ministries of Army and Navy, and Internal Affairs, members of the Revolutionary Alliance, which Tang had recently joined, won appointments to four out of the ten ministries.

Notable among them was Song Jiaoren, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, who was a leading drafter of the Provisional Constitution which obliged the president to share power with the Parliament. Song was a rising star of the Revolutionary Alliance, who, at thirty-one, ranked only behind the veteran leaders, Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing. Yuan was unhappy about not being able to control the cabinet, after it became clear that Tang Shaoyi was unwilling to be his tool. They clashed seriously on matters of authority. In June, Tang as well as other ministers associated with the Revolutionary Alliance resigned, after Yuan flouted Tang's authority. Soon the cabinet no longer exercised any check on the Presidential authority, after Yuan coerced the parliament to approve all his nominees to the various ministries.

On the military side, Yuan wanted to weaken the Revolutionary Alliance, the chief promoter of republicanism, by cutting down the military forces controlled by those who belonged to, or associated with, this group of political activists in southern China. In order to achieve this aim, he used the need to unify the armed forces as a pretext to disband a large number of soldiers in the military forces of a number of southern provinces. While battering it in his actions, Yuan affected enthusiasm and support for republicanism, a posture both Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing, leaders of the Revolutionary Alliance, seemed to want to believe in. From his office in Nanjing, Huang cooperated in earnest with Yuan's directive to reduce the military force controlled by the revolutionaries. When Huang finished this task in June 1912, he was without an official post, as his office was closed. Sun's optimism about the republic led him to declare that he would withdraw from politics for the next ten years. In August 1912, Yuan employed a charm offensive by inviting Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing to Beijing, ostensibly to discuss government policies, but really to win their endorsement for his becoming officially the actual president, rather than just a provisional one. Yuan succeeded in getting both his guests to declare their support for him. Being devoted to China's development, Sun was pleased when, in September 1912, Yuan put him in charge of railway construction in China. Sun set up a company in Shanghai, and produced an ambitious plan for extending China's railroad networks. It came to nothing, because Yuan had other priorities.

Before Yuan revealed his anti-republican tendencies more fully, the people of Yangzi China and further south were buoyed up by the hope and expectation of a new era of freedom and democracy. Political activists joined together to form parties (*dang*), and the press geared itself up for the election of the representatives to the two-chamber Congress that was to take place toward the end of 1912, as demanded by the Provisional Constitution. Song Jiaoren and other Revolutionary Alliance activists placed their hopes of curbing the overweening presidential authority of Yuan through winning the election, as a mandate from the people to strengthen the Congress. With the support of Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing, Song Jiaoren transformed the Revolutionary Alliance and some other friendly groups into the Guomindang (or Kuomintang in the Wade-Giles transliteration), meaning National People's Party (or the Nationalist Party)

for running candidates in the coming election. Song travelled the country widely and focused his campaign on the need to check the president's power, and to protect the authority of the Congress. Though there were three hundred or so small 'parties', the Guomindang's main competitors were the Democratic Party (headed by the reformer Liang Qichao) and the Republican Party (manly conservative constitutionalists). The last two merged to become the Progressive Party that, by and large, supported the government. These political parties, like democracy in China, were in their infancy, relative to their counterparts in modern Western nations, though cliques, associations and societies formed for political purposes had a long tradition in China.

In January 1913, when the result of the first Chinese national election became clear, the Guomindang was clearly the winner. This party received overwhelmingly more votes than their three major rivals from the roughly 40 million people who met the qualifications to vote. Being the leader of the victorious party that would dominate the Parliament, Song Jiaoren expected to become the Premier, and form a cabinet according to the rules of the Provisional Constitution. Song felt greatly encouraged. But as he travelled to Beijing to take his place in the government, he was assassinated on March 20<sup>th</sup>, at a train station in Shanghai. This was a deeply shocking event, and angry members of the Guomindang demanded that the culprits be arrested and punished. Yuan immediately ordered the apprehension of the criminals. After they were caught and put on trial, letters and telegrams were found which proved that Yuan Shi-kai himself had hired the assassins through his own cabinet secretary and his handpicked premier. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the Military Governor of Jiangsu published the evidence, documented by the foreign-controlled Shanghai Mixed Court.

In Nanjing, the outraged Sun Yat-sen called for military action against Yuan, but Haung Xing opposed such a move as he was aware of the military weakness of their side. Infuriated at being exposed, Yuan secretly prepared for military action against several southern provinces where the Guomindang held sway. Military ventures were usually costly. Since Yuan's government was even more short of financial resources than its Qing predecessor, Yuan had to raise funds before he could make war against the Guomindang.

### *3.2 Yuan's financial difficulties: burdensome loans, and the role of the Maritime Customs Service (MCS)*

The main reason for Yuan's financial stringency lay in the central government's loss of control of most of its normal sources of revenue: the land tax, duties on the movement of goods (the maritime customs on foreign trade, the native customs on internal trade, and the *lijin*), and the salt tax. Many of the provinces that had broken away from the Qing did not give the new republican government at Beijing all, or sometimes even a part, of its share of the land and other taxes they collected locally, until Yuan succeeded in effecting greater control from the centre.

The Qing had had another major source of income, and that was the maritime customs on foreign trade at the treaty ports. This income had become ever more important as the government's financial position grew increasingly strained. In 1901, the Qing's total annual tax revenue was 88,000,000 taels, while the maritime customs collection was 23,000,000 taels, or 26% of the total. However, after 1901, the payment of the Boxer Indemnity, together with the service of the foreign loans in connection with the Japanese Indemnity, absorbed the entire customs collection, and more. As a result, this revenue was no longer available to the Qing and its Chinese republican successors, until the time when the customs collection grew sufficiently large to yield a surplus, after deducting the administrative costs of the MCS and all the foreign obligations laid upon it.

Just before the beginning of the Chinese Republic, the control of this source of revenue had been taken away from the Chinese authorities, by an agreement between the departing Qing and the representatives of the imperial powers. Before the Revolution of 1911, the foreign Inspector General of the MCS was instrumental in collecting the customs revenue, but he had nothing to do with the custody and disposal of this revenue. The custodianship of the customs revenue belonged to the local Chinese superintendent of customs, who disposed of it for official uses that might include foreign debt payments. On the eve of the Revolution, China's foreign creditors were alarmed by the possibility of default in debt payment, if the Qing government, which had contracted the debt, were to collapse. In order to safeguard the payment of the huge Boxer Indemnity of 1901, and the three pre-1900 foreign loans contracted between 1895 and 1898 for paying the hefty Japanese indemnity of 1895, the foreign Diplomatic Corps at Beijing, together with the new Inspector General, Francis Aglen, who had recently succeed Sir Robert Hart, persuaded the Qing to conclude an agreement on January 1912, authorizing the MCS to take over all the responsibility in connection with the revenue that had previously belonged to the Chinese superintendent of customs. Thus, from this point onward the foreign I.G. was authorized to take care of the collection, banking, custody and disposal of the maritime customs revenue. In addition, the 1912 Agreement also gave the I.G. complete jurisdiction of a number of native customs stations within 50 *li* (1 *li* = ½ kilometre) of certain treaty ports, since the revenue from these collectorates had also been attached to the payment of the above-mentioned foreign debt. However, before the emergence of a surplus in the customs revenue held by the I.G., after deducting the administrative expenses of the MCS and the required foreign debt payments, there was no money from this source for Yuan's government.

The new Chinese Republic, as the Qing successor, inherited the 1912 Agreement that surrendered Chinese control of an important source of its government's revenue. Following this agreement, the Commissioners

of Customs or Officers-in-Charge at the treaty ports remitted, after deducting the authorized expenses, the Customs revenue to a number of accounts in the I.G.'s name in a British Bank, which was to distribute the funds accumulated there, at regular intervals, in equal amounts, to three foreign custodian banks appointed to receive the money. With the I.G.'s standing authority, the Commissioner of Customs at Shanghai was to draw funds from the custodian banks for loan payments, when such were due, in the order of the priority fixed by the International Commissioner of Bankers. This body was to inform the Diplomatic Corps at Beijing about the actual state of the appropriation of the revenue through quarterly reports. Later, when law and order broke down more seriously in China, this arrangement ensured that China's foreign creditors continued not only to receive their debt payments, but regularly and on schedule. As a debt-collecting agency of the powers, foreign protection enabled the foreign-managed MCS to operate without interference from the Chinese authorities. The military power and presence of the foreign creditor nations in China also prevented the seizure by Chinese authorities of revenue collected by the MCS. Because of the 1912 Agreement, foreign control of Chinese revenue increased soon after the fall of the Qing. Foreign interference or control of Chinese government finances would increase even more, as impoverished and unstable regimes in Beijing, starting with Yuan Shi-kai's, turned to loans, both foreign and domestic, to keep their government solvent.

During the first few years of the Chinese Republic, the government under Yuan was not able to meet its administrative expenses of some \$3,000,000 per month, let alone fund a war chest for the mooted military action against the Guomindang. Following the Qing's pioneering example, Yuan's government issued a First Year 6% Loan for \$200,000,000. The bond failed because of lack of public confidence in the Chinese government security. Financial desperation compelled Yuan to borrow from a monopolistic foreign banking consortium, despite the onerous financial and political terms demanded by the lenders.

On April 26, 1913, the Beijing government raised a loan for 25,000,000 GBP from a five-member consortium of British, French, German, Russian and Japanese banks. It became known as the Reorganization Loan, because one of the objectives given for this loan was to fund the reorganization of the salt administration, the entire collected revenue of which was pledged as the primary security for this loan, subject to the previous foreign obligations. The secondary security was the maritime customs 'surplus'. The other purposes offered by the Yuan government for this loan were: to meet the outstanding foreign debts of both the central and provincial authorities; to provide funds for government administration; and to provide funds for the disbandment of troops.

Like the foreign loans of the mid-1890s, it was a costly long-term loan. The Chinese government was going to receive only 84% of the nominal sum, or 21,000,000 GBP. After running for 47 years at 5% interest, China would have paid approximately 67,000,000 GBP by 1960, when the loan would have been liquidated. Besides the sheer costliness, the restrictive political conditions in the contract for this loan represented a further compromise of the integrity and independence of the Chinese government. The Chinese government's freedom to dispose of the borrowed funds was restricted by the terms of the loan contract. A list of outstanding foreign debts, which amounted to 11,000,000 GBP, had to be deducted from the loan as first claim. Before the government could draw from the balance, definite sums were to be set aside for the payment of a number of maturing foreign loans, foreign claims for damages arising out of the Revolution of 1911, disbandment of troops, and the reorganization of the salt administration. These came to about 7,000,000 GBP. What was left of the loan was sufficient for the administrative expenses for the Beijing government for the next six months.

But before the Chinese government could draw on the loan funds for administrative purposes, certain conditions had to be met. The government was required to submit a half-year's estimate of current expenses, listing in detail the amount necessary for the maintenance of each ministry, and to enact a 'bill of account' for setting up an 'account and audit department'. Even after the above conditions were met, the Chinese government had to secure the approval of a foreign auditor, as well as his Chinese colleague, before drawing from the loan funds.

Other political conditions laid down in the loan contract concerned the reorganization of the salt administration, which was to be controlled by a Chinese chief inspector and a foreign associate chief inspector. The branch offices in the rest of the country were each to be jointly managed by a Chinese and a foreign district inspector, and they were to have joint responsibility for the collection and the lodging of the salt revenue. This revenue was to be kept in a special 'Chinese Government Salt Revenue Account' in the consortium banks, or 'depositories' approved by the same. In case of default, after a period of grace, the salt administration was to be taken over by the foreign managed MCS.

The Reorganization Loan marked a further step in the decline of the financial, if not also the political position, of the Chinese government. The Qing government had resorted to foreign loans largely for meeting the extraordinary financial demands of anti-imperialist wars and their settlements, while its Republican successors relied on foreign loans for ordinary administrative expenses. The harsh political conditions of this loan aroused vehement patriotic protests. Prominent among those who denounced it were the former Premier, Tang Shaoyi, and the first President of the Chinese Republic, Sun Yat-sen. Many newly elected

members of the Congress, particularly those who belonged to the Guomindang, were vociferously critical of this loan after they had gathered in Beijing. Patriotic Chinese were concerned about the extension of foreign control into yet another major Chinese fiscal institution. The government must have appeared distressingly short-sighted in alienating a major source of revenue for an extended period of several decades, in exchange for a few months' administrative expenses. The acceptance of such stringent foreign supervision and control over the disposal of the borrowed funds, lowered the dignity, and further compromised the independence, of the Chinese government.

### *3.3 Yuan becomes Emperor of Imperial China*

Although funding military action against the Guomindang was not given as a purpose for the Reorganization Loan, two months after signing the loan contract, Yuan began, in June 1913, moving troops south and threatening the Guomindang leaders with a punitive expedition, if they did not cease trouble-making. Hoping to provoke his opponents into making the first war-like move, so that he could blame them for starting a civil war, he dismissed the military governors of three southern provinces, who opposed him as members of the Guomindang. Early in July, Sun Yat-sen called a conference of the leading political and military figures in Nanjing, to decide on a response. Soon after, five provinces south of the Yangzi, including the three led by the military governors dismissed by Yuan, together with the cities of Shanghai and Chongqing, declared independence from Beijing. However, the Guomindang-led forces lacked internal cohesion, and they were no match for the army sent by Yuan. Before the middle of September 1913, the so-called 'second revolution' was crushed. Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing were once more forced to shelter themselves in Japan<sup>1</sup>. The triumphant Yuan Shikai put his own men in charge of the provinces he had captured, dissolved their provincial assemblies and arrested the assemblymen. He closed newspapers, disestablished political parties, banned political associations, and criminalized, or even executed, those who opposed him.

Having delivered a strong blow to the forces of democracy, Yuan quickly proceeded with a step-by-step plan to make himself president with autocratic power. Targeting the newly elected members of Congress,

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently, Sun attributed the Guomindang's failure in this 'second revolution' against Yuan to his own lack of power in the Guomindang. In 1914, he set up the anti-Yuan Chinese Revolutionary Party in Tokyo, giving himself dictatorial powers over the three classes of members, who had to swear personal allegiance to him and obey his orders. Senior Guomindang members like Huang Xing, who also retreated to Japan, would not join this new organization on account of Sun's stringent requirements. While in Tokyo, he divorced his first wife, and married Soong Qingling, his faithful aid of many years. Sun returned to China in 1917 after the death of Yuan Shikai.



he induced the three major Guomintang rivals, the Democratic, Republican, and the Unification parties, to amalgamate into one party, the Progressive Party, which could almost outvote the Guomintang. He bribed members of this party to vote for him as president before the new Congress brought out a new constitution. Corruption aside, this was a highly irregular procedure, because the constitution was to lay down laws governing the presidential election, the length of each term and the number of terms the president was to serve, as well as his authority and responsibility. In October 1913, Yuan arranged to have several thousand plain-clothes military police and gangsters surround the Congress in session, to intimidate the members of the Congress, who were forced to vote for Yuan for president before they were allowed to leave. This was how the Provisional President Yuan Shi-kai became the actual President of the Republic of China. On the next day, Li Yuanhong was elected Vice-President.

Yuan's next step was to concentrate power in his hands by rendering the Congress impotent. Early in November, Yuan disqualified members of Congress who belonged to the Guomintang, and dissolved their organization, citing the party's role in the anti-government 'second revolution'. Removing the 438 Guomintang members of Congress meant that there was no longer a quorum to vote on any legislation. This did not trouble Yuan in the slightest. He organized a political conference to justify his decision to abolish the Congress, together with the provincial assemblies and self-governing bodies.

Notwithstanding his high-handed rough handling of governmental institutions, Yuan continued to be interested in maintaining a façade of legality and legitimacy. In May 1914, he replaced the 'Provisional Constitution of the Chinese Republic', passed by the Parliament in Nanjing, by the 'Constitution of the Chinese Republic' produced by his appointees. This new constitution gave the authority and role of the premier, together with that of his cabinet, to the president. The presidential office was enlarged to include organizations such as *Zhengzhi Tang* (Bureau of Political Affairs), and *Canzheng Yuan* (Office of Political Participation), that functioned like a legislature and a cabinet, but without the independence to exercise any check on the power of the president. They were just the tools of the president to do his bidding. The Office of Political Participation helped Yuan to revise the laws pertaining to the office of the president. For example, the presidential term of office was extended to ten years from the previous five. There was no need for a new election for the incumbent to continue to take up this office for further terms, if such was considered politically necessary. Before a president's term in office came to an end, the incumbent had the power to recommend a successor, without restriction as regards whom he was allowed to recommend. By the middle of 1914, Yuan had destroyed the young Republic's democratic institutions, and had become the president of an autocracy, with power as unlimited as any emperor before him. With the law his henchmen had written governing the presidential office, members of his family could monopolize the presidential

office much like a traditional dynasty. Censorship laws and severe punishments silenced the press and other public expressions of criticism, against him or his government. However, once in possession of these dictatorial powers, Yuan did try to develop the agriculture economy, expand education, and carry out judicial, penal and currency reforms, much like the beginning of a new dynasty.

In August 1914, after the First World War broke out in Europe, China declared neutrality. Focused on their war efforts, the Western imperialist powers had little to spare either to press for more gains in China, or to check the ambition of their rival in the Far East. Japan took the opportunity to intensify its encroachment on China. After declaring war on Germany, the Japanese, in violation of China's neutrality, sent troops to take over the German sphere of influence in Shandong, occupying Qingdao and the Jiaozhou railways. Unwilling to stop there, in January 1915 the Japanese presented Yuan's government with an alarming 'Twenty-one Demands', that threatened to turn China into a Japanese colony. Being aware of Yuan's ambition to restore monarchy, with himself as the Emperor of China, the Japanese offered to support him in exchange for his agreement to their demands. Yuan yielded to most of these demands, confirming the Japanese takeover of Germany's former sphere of influence in Shandong, and recognizing Japan's special position in eastern Inner Mongolia and the southern part of the Three Eastern Provinces (southern Manchuria), where the Japanese leases for a couple of port cities and a certain railway were to be extended, promising that ports, harbours and islands along China's coast could not to be leased or ceded to another country, and agreeing to the joint operation of the Han-Ye-Ping industrial complex in central China. Yuan did not accept the demands that the Chinese government was to employ Japanese political, financial and military advisers, and to cooperate on matters concerning police and arsenal, as well as on the development of the Fujian province, in which Japan had a long-term interest. The news of Yuan's capitulation to these Japanese demands created an enormous storm in China. Demonstrations, protests, strikes, and boycotts of Japanese goods appeared all over China. Japanese aggression added fuel to the fire of twentieth century Chinese nationalism.

Yuan's need for foreign recognition and support was exploited not only by Japan. After the Revolution of 1911, both Tibet and Outer Mongolia, like many Chinese provinces, declared independence from the central government in Beijing. Britain saw this as an opportunity to wrench Tibet away from China, while Russia saw the same with regard to Outer Mongolia, where it had already acquired a position of dominance. Each of these imperial powers put pressure on Yuan to acknowledge the independence of these former dependencies and vassals of the Qing. At first, Yuan stood by the Chinese Republic's claim for these regions, as the successor of the Qing. In 1913, in exchange for these powers' recognition of his government, Yuan accepted a compromise for each of these territories. In the case of Tibet, the three parties concerned

- Britain, Tibet and China - agreed on Chinese suzerainty and Tibetan autonomy, while acknowledging a British interest in Tibet. In the case of Outer Mongolia, the three parties concerned adopted a similar formula. Other powers, such as France and America, with vested interests in business investments and loans in China, recognized Yuan's government without such diplomatic bargaining. Soon after he was elected, President Wilson, considering the Reorganization Loan exploitative, withdrew American participation in the banking consortium that offered this loan to the Chinese government.

Despite Yuan's unpopularity with the more progressive elements in China, his rule appeared to be stabilizing. His government had foreign recognition, and he had taken control of more of the southern provinces by defeating the 'second revolution'. In the summer of 1914, he sent an army of 200,000 troops to crush a peasant uprising in central China. In terms of money for his government's coffers, more taxes from the provinces reached Beijing, as he consolidated his authority in the provinces. In addition, his government successfully raised funds from the Chinese public through the Third- and Fourth-Year Domestic loans, after the people were assured of the financial security of these attractively-priced government bonds. However, from the middle of 1914 his drive toward realizing his monarchical ambition would soon destabilize the young Chinese republic.

In June 1914, Yuan first tried to concentrate military power in his hands by abolishing the office of provincial military governorship, and replacing, where possible, the provincial military governors with military officers personally loyal to him from a centralized Staff Office of Generals, which he set up at Beijing. Not trusting Duan Qirui, who headed the Beiyang Army, Yuan established, later that year, a Model Military controlled directly by himself as the Great Marshall, shifting the forces under Duan to his personal control. Also in 1914, he changed the order of the officialdom to be more in line with that of a Chinese 'feudal' monarchy. He re-established the state cult of Confucius and the worship of Heaven.

After all the preliminary moves to dismantle the republican institutions, to demolish opposition and to gather power, civil and military, into his own hands, Yuan endeavoured to give his restoration of monarchy a semblance of legitimacy and legality. Since the new-fangled republican ideology came from abroad, Yuan's American and Japanese advisers each published an article, stating that monarchy was the best form of government for the Chinese people, who were not ready for the political demands of a republic. Then Yuan directed a group of his willing servants to organize a 'Conference for Security Planning' (*Chou An Hui*), gathering delegates from the provincial branches in Beijing, ostensibly for investigating which of the two forms of government was the most suitable for China, but really to spread propaganda in favour of monarchy. On September 2, 1914, members of the Conference for Security Planning petitioned the Office

of Political Participation to change the form of government to monarchy. Since restoring monarchy contradicted his own declaration against such an eventuality when he had accepted the provisional presidency, Yuan pretended to demur. On his suggestion for letting the majority of the people decide, 1993 ‘Representatives of the people’, so-called, were ‘elected’ in various provinces in October. By the middle of November, a National Conference of these Representatives voted unanimously for the restoration of monarchy, and for Yuan Shi-kai as the Emperor of Imperial China. After an initial show of reluctance, stressing his unworthiness, Yuan accepted the position, on December 12 1915, after the Office of Political Participation heaped praises on his merits and achievements. He then ennobled his supporters, creating a new aristocracy for his dynasty, and commanded that his reign was to commence on January 1, 1916, which was to be the first year of *Hong Xian* (Vast Law).

### *3.4 Yuan’s death, the restoration of the Qing, and the disintegration of the central authority*

It soon became apparent that Yuan had grossly misjudged the political situation in China. More than a decade of anti-monarchical and pro-republican publicity, and ‘educational’ efforts by the revolutionaries, had taken China beyond the point of returning to a system of government that was considered antiquated and harmful. Towards the end of 1915 a group including a talented military commander Cai E opposed Yuan in Yunan, and seized power. They declared the province independent and advanced the ‘Protect the Nation’ army, which they organized against neighbouring provinces under Yuan’s control. Soon four other provinces also followed suit. Sun Yat-sen directed members or supporters of the Revolutionary Party, which he founded in 1917 in Japan, to support the anti-Yuan movement politically and militarily in China. The alarmed Yuan gathered an army of over 100,000, hoping to annihilate his enemies in one engagement, but his forces were defeated by a much smaller one from Yunan. Duan Qirui and other senior leaders of the Beiyang Army took a wait-and-see attitude at first, and later they sent a joint telegram to Yuan, urging him to abandon the restoration of monarchy. Noting the strength of the anti-Yuan developments, the foreign powers, even Japan, withdrew their support for him. Faced with such overwhelming opposition, Yuan terminated his dynastic rule on March 3, 1916. However, he still wished to remain the President. Opposition to him remained fierce, and in May 1916, even his trusted lieutenants whom he had put in charge of Sichuan and Hunan turned against him. On June 6, 1916, succumbing to a serious illness, Yuan died.

Upon Yuan’s death, the Vice-President Li Yuanhong became President, while Duan Qirui took over the Premiership. Unlike Duan, Li had no troops of his own, although Feng Guozhang, a senior leader of the

Beiyang Army like Duan, backed him. Li revived the Congress and the Provisional Constitution, with the hope of being able to run the government with these means. Like his former boss Yuan Shi-kai, Duan had no use for democratic institutions, and he and Li were soon struggling for ascendancy. In 1917, their relationship reached breaking point over their differences in policy concerning World War I.

In April 1917, as a result of German submarine attacks on neutral shipping in the Atlantic, America entered the war on the side of England and France. Duan was persuaded by the American representative to do the same. Being interested in securing Duan's cooperation with Japanese expansion into the German sphere of influence in Shandong, Japan also encouraged Duan to enter the war. The opportunity to expand his military force, promises of aid from Japan, as well as the freeing of the German Boxer Indemnity for domestic use, induced Duan to decide in favour of declaring war on Germany, even though America, casting a wary eye on Japan, no longer desired China's entry into the war. With American support, President Li and the Congress took the opposite stand against Duan on this issue. Then Duan used military police and hooligans to surround the Congress, as Yuan had done before, and tried to force the members to declare war on Germany. The members of Congress, refusing to toe the line, upbraided Duan, and Li dismissed him from the premiership.

Threatening Li with military action, Duan urged his military cohorts in charge of a number of northern provinces to declare independence from Beijing. With no troops of his own, Li sought help from General Zhang Xun, the Military Governor of Anhui, not suspecting that the general harboured a plan of his own. General Zhang had risen as high as governor-general under the Qing, and he remained a staunch Qing loyalist, with his troops still wearing the queue. The political changes at the end of the Qing had not deprived him of his troops, nor his chance to become a military governor of a province. Because he had helped Yuan to suppress the 'second revolution', Yuan had kept him in high office. With Duan's support, Zhang forced Li to disband the Congress. After entering Beijing, he forced Li to vacate his office, and then revealed his grand plan. With Beijing under his control, Zhang seized the opportunity to carry out what he had long desired: the restoration of the Qing dynasty. On July 1, 1917, with the help of the scholar-reformer Kang Youwei, he put Puyi (the abdicated Xuantong Emperor), then eleven years old, back onto the throne.

The restoration of the Qing created a violent storm across the China. Most of the newspapers stopped publication in protest. 10,000 people gathered in Hunan calling for raising an armed force against Beijing. Sun Yat-sen convened a meeting of the Revolutionary Party and other military leaders in Shanghai, to discuss fighting the forces of reaction in Beijing. Li Yuanhong, who had retreated to the safety of the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, wired Duan, restoring the latter's premiership and requested him to take military action against Zhang. Duan promptly advanced his troops on Beijing, capturing the city on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, twelve days after Puyi's enthronement. General Zhang escaped to the safe haven of the Dutch

Embassy in Beijing, and would return to his old base to operate as an independent warlord. Emperor Puyi, deposed but unpunished, was allowed to resume his luxurious life in the Forbidden City, where he was required, by order of the new president, to receive a modern education from Western tutors.

After Duan returned to power as the Premier and the Minister of War, he was happy to leave the Congress, which had been disbanded by Zhang, in abeyance, and he ran the government as an autocrat. In August, he declared war on Germany, though China was in no position to finance an army to fight a war in Europe. However, Britain and France were in need of labourers so as to free their able-bodied men for battle, after sustaining heavy loss of lives at the front. Even before China declared war, processing stations were established in the British naval base at Weihaiwei, and later at Qingdao, to ship tens of thousands of Chinese to northern France, where they were put to work digging trenches, building barracks and hospitals, unloading military cargos at the docks and so on. By late 1918, almost 100,000 Chinese had participated in the European war effort in this way. Although the work was hard and dangerous - they worked a 10-hour day and seven days a week, except for some Chinese traditional festivals - and the living conditions grim, many returned home finding themselves better equipped for life, because they had accumulated savings from the wages paid to their families in China, had acquired an education, thanks largely the efforts of the YMCA, and had learned about the wider world.

Duan allied himself closely with Japan, which supplied him with large amounts of money to further his ambition of dominating China by military force, at a time when the political authority of the central government was rapidly slipping away. But China had to pay at a heavy price for his financial dependence on Japan. In 1917, Duan raised a loan of 500,000,000 yen from Japan, by mortgaging railways, mines, forests, and telecommunication systems, and by giving Japan special rights which infringed China's sovereignty and rendered China vulnerable to Japanese domination. In 1918, he concluded secret agreements with Japan that gave the Japanese the right to station police and troops in Jinan (the provincial capital of Shandong), and Qingdao (a vital port city formerly in the German sphere of influence in Shandong). He mortgaged to Japan the future income from two new railways that the Japanese planned to build in Shandong, as part payment of Japanese loans. After the October Revolution in Russia, Duan's government concluded joint military defence treaties with Japan, which permitted the Japanese to deploy troops in China's Northeast and in Mongolia. Soon large Japanese forces moved in to take over Russia's former sphere of influence in China's Northeast.

Duan Qirui's dictatorial regime, which had surrendered China's sovereign rights, aroused a great deal of public opposition in China. Sun Yat-sen returned to China from Tokyo in 1917, after the death of Yuan. Sun was especially critical of Duan's operating an autocracy under the cover of a republican government. He called a meeting of the original members of the twice-disbanded Congress, and military leaders from

Guangzhou (better known as Canton in the West during that time), and set up the 'Military Government of the Chinese Republic', with himself as the Grand Marshal and two southern Military Governors, Tang Jiyao and Lu Jiongting as Marshals. He then launched a military campaign against Duan in the name of protecting the 'Provisional Constitution'. Like his military expedition against Yuan Shi-kai in 1912, Sun was again trying to use military forces controlled by others against an enemy of democracy in China, and again he failed because the provincial military powerholders had more immediate interests and concerns of their own, rather than fighting for democracy. After his brittle military allies moved against him by subverting the 'extraordinary' Congress, Sun was forced to resign and abandon his campaign. The disappointed Sun could only retreat to Shanghai, bringing with him the lesson that the militarists, whether north or south, were 'jackals from the same lair' (a Chinese idiom), and that he could not rely on them to achieve his revolutionary goals.

## 4. The Warlord Era

### 4.1 *The origins of warlord ascendancy*

The rule of Duan Qirui marked the beginning of a further stage of political breakdown in China. China had entered into what is often characterized as the warlord era. Militarism at this stage in China was by no means a sudden development. It had its roots in the late Qing provincial military build-up, which originated as a movement for the suppression of the fierce rebellions that sprang up from the 1850s. Because the Manchu Banner troops and the Chinese Green Battalions, on which the military power of the central government had been based, were no longer serviceable, Chinese gentry-officials developed the new Xiang and the Huai Armies to save the Confucian monarchy. The Beiyang Army that came later was also a legacy of this development. Although the Qing dynasty survived these rebellions with the help of their Chinese gentry-officials, its authority declined. There appeared an irreversible shift in the balance of power between the central government and the provincial authorities, in favour of the latter. Before the Revolution of 1911, the loyalty of the provincial leaders had kept any potentially separatist tendencies in check. The Revolution of 1911 represented not only the final rejection of the Manchu monarchy; it also strengthened the tendency for provincial independence. This tendency was kept temporarily at bay during the Presidency of Yuan Shi-kai, by the hope that China might find a new unity under a democratic constitutional republic. The failure of the first leaders of the young Republic to provide China with a stable and viable alternative form of government at the centre, destroyed the tenuous bond between the centre and the regions or provinces.

Another contributory factor lay in the military reform and modernization of the forces scattered in the provinces and regions during the last decade of the Qing. The political instability that led to a heavy reliance on local armed forces for internal security disturbed the balance of authority between the civilian and the military authorities in the government. The groundwork for the ascendancy of the military was thus laid. When the fabric of civilian government broke down from the centre between 1916 and 1917, the fragmentation of China into independent or semi-independent provinces and regions, dominated by militarists, could be seen as a culmination of a major trend in the late Qing political development.

#### *4.2 The characteristics of the warlords*

The period of interregnum during which warring militarists vied for ascendancy in China lasted for over a decade, roughly from 1916 to 1928, when the Guomindang-led Northern Expedition enabled this party to establish an internationally recognized government of the Republic of China in Nanjing. At the start of this period, the area of north and central China was dominated by three major groups of warlords. Two derived their power from the late Qing Beiyang Army. One of these was Duan Qirui and the Anfu clique, that controlled Anhui, Fujian, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Shaanxi and some other areas. The other was Feng Guozhang who, as the leader of the Zhili clique, controlled Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Hubei. Later, the Zhili clique produced two independent warlords: Feng Yuxiang and Wu Peifu. The third warlord was Zhang Zuolin, who rose from the ranks as a freelance soldier, and led the Fengtian clique from his power base in the Northeast; he held the balance of power between the Anfu and Zhili cliques. In addition, there was also Yen Xishan, who dominated the province of Shanxi as its Military Governor since the Revolution of 1911, and General Zhang Xun of the 12-day Qing restoration fame, who still controlled an army in Xuzhou in Anhui. In south and southwest of China, Tang Jiyao had his power base in Yunnan and Guizhou, while Lu Rongting controlled Guangxi, and Chen Qiongmeng dominated Guangdong. Sichuan was in the hands of Yang Sen.

The militarists or warlords were self-seekers, rather than nation-builders. While some fought to defend their domains, the more ambitious ones, like Duan Qirui, tried to unite China by force. Because they lacked a viable political program to win the support of the people and to give them legitimacy, none were able to unite China. Sun Yat-sen had been repeatedly let down by them, when he sought their help to unite and rebuild China. Their drive for dominance and territorial expansion produced a state of almost chronic civil war, which was inevitably accompanied by economic dislocation and the destruction of life and property. There were 112 wars during the period of their endless battles. Nor were these merely skirmishes of short duration that covered a small area: the opposite was the case. From 1916 -1924 alone, the average area at war each year covered 7 provinces.



It was an unstable situation where territories changed hands, old groups splintered and broke up, and new warlords rose to follow independent paths. In a condition of general disorder, banditry became rife. There was little difference between the behaviour of the warlords' soldiers and that of common bandits. In areas they occupied, they would replace the civilian administrator with their own appointees, especially those in charge of revenue collection. In order to finance their wars, extremely burdensome taxes were imposed on an already impoverished population. Opium smoking and cultivation, almost eradicated during the last years of the Qing, and under Yuan Shi-kai's rule, returned with a vengeance, as some warlords found the drug a good source of revenue. The warlords were transitional figures in a transitional period in China, where the old political culture with its moral consensus had broken down, and the new one was yet to be born. They were animated neither by the old virtues of loyalty and benevolence, nor by the new spirit of nationalism and democracy. Their conflicts brought a lot of suffering to the people of China.

With the possible exception of Feng Yuxiang and Yang Sen, the warlords were generally not anti-imperialist. They sometimes allied themselves with one foreign power or another with a view to getting financial and military aid, or political support. Duan Qirui's relationship with Japan was an example. Zhang Zuoling also needed Japanese patronage to operate in the Northeast. The southern and the Zhili warlords were friendly to the British and the Americans. During the years of warlord contention, there were foreign gunboats in Chinese waters, and troops in certain treaty ports. The threat of retaliation kept the lives and properties of foreigners safe from the depredations of the armies of the warlords.

### *4.3 The Beijing government and the imperial powers*

For many reasons, the northern warlords regarded Beijing as a prize worth fighting for. Between 1916 and 1928, the Beijing government was controlled by a succession of militarists who ran it with the aid of their civilian dependants. Throughout most of this period, the foreign powers continued to treat the Beijing government as the central government of China, whoever was holding the reins of power. This diplomatic fiction was sometimes difficult to maintain, since this government was unrepresentative, unstable, and obviously without authority in areas outside the jurisdiction of the current militarists in charge of it. There were relatively long periods, between the frequent changes of the leaders of government, when there was no government at Beijing at all. The apparent deterioration of political standards made it increasingly difficult for the powers to give formal diplomatic recognition to the regime controlling the Beijing government. De facto international recognition was given in November 1924, to the Provisional government led by Duan Qirui, who returned to power after having been in charge of this government between 1916 and late 1918. And in 1926 the powers also dealt with the government controlled by Zhang Zuolin in the same way.

The powers drifted into this position for a variety of reasons. It was sometimes necessary and convenient to have a Chinese authority, which the foreign powers, by implicit agreement, could call upon to negotiate for China. This role very naturally fell to the successive Beijing governments, partly because the city of Beijing had been the traditional capital, the headquarters of the Chinese civil administration and the foreign diplomatic missions, and partly because the northern warlords were mostly in the mainstream of Chinese politics during this period. Until the powers seriously considered, in the late 1920s, the claim of the government formed by the Guomindang to be the representative government of China, there was no real alternative. Another important reason was financial. It was assumed that the security of the foreign indemnity and loan obligations entered into by the Chinese governments, under the Qing and President Yuan Shi-kai, depended on having a Chinese central government which could be held responsible for it.

For the warlords, there were a number of advantages in connection with the control of Beijing. First, it carried the prestige of acting for China internationally. Secondly, it gave the warlords concerned a certain amount of power of appointment in the regions. Thirdly, it gave them the opportunity to control the major Beijing banks connected with the government, namely the Bank of China and the Bank of Communication, especially the latter. Unfortunately, the note-issuing and overdraft facilities of these banks were frequently exploited by warlord regimes, to the detriment of the banks and finance in general. Fourthly, it enabled the militarists to raise funds through the floatation of domestic or foreign loans using the credit, organization, and other resources of this government.

However, bank overdrafts and public loans had to be supported by other sources of income. In 1916, an important source of income for the Beijing government emerged from the maritime customs revenue, which was in the custody of the British Inspector General (I.G.) Francis Aglen, of the Maritime Customs Service (MCS), the headquarters of which was located at Beijing.

That the foreign-managed MCS was able to exist as a centralized organization, and to collect customs revenue in the 43 treaty ports spread all over a turbulent China without local seizure, was a result of foreign, particularly British, protection. However, from 1925 onwards, this organization, being challenged by an intense outpouring of Chinese nationalism and the rise of the Guomindang, had to readjust its relationship with the Chinese authorities, as it could no longer rely on the foreign powers to underwrite its security.

#### *4.4 Foreign interference in China's finances*

Although the rates of the Chinese customs duty and transit tax on foreign imports, fixed respectively at 5% and 2.5% of the value of the goods, were low, the growth of Sino-foreign trade resulted in a surplus of customs revenue in 1916, after deduction of the MCS's administrative expenses (on average roughly

about 9% of the total annual revenue) and the foreign financial obligations (the Boxer Indemnity and the three pre-1900 foreign loans). The table below illustrates the growth of the customs collection.

Year	Customs Collection in Haikwan (Customs) Taels
1915	36,747,706
1920	49,819,885
1926	80,435,962
1929	154,079,428

The I.G. of the MCS and, to some extent, the Diplomatic Corps at Beijing, had become the trustees of the Customs revenue after the 1912 Agreement between the Qing and the foreign powers. At that time the entire customs collection was not sufficient to cover the administrative expenses plus the above-mentioned foreign obligations. The 1912 Agreement made no provision for the contingency when the balance might grow beyond the requirement of covering the administrative charges and the foreign obligations. As a result of the way Aglen implemented this agreement, he and the Diplomatic Corps exercised complete control over the disposal of the Chinese customs revenue, including the 'Customs Surplus'.

In 1917, Francis Aglen informed the Chinese government at Beijing, and the Diplomatic Corps, of the existence of this surplus. Because of the 1912 Agreement, the Chinese government had to apply to the Diplomatic Corps for a grant, stating the amount desired and the purpose for which the money would be used, even though all the parties concerned recognized that the 'Customs Surplus' rightly belonged to China. On being assured by the I.G. that such a grant would not imperil the servicing of the foreign financial obligations already charged to the customs revenue, the Diplomatic Corps could give permission for the requested release. By following this procedure, the Beijing government obtained 10 million Shanghai taels of 'Customs Surplus' from the I.G.

In 1918, leaders of Sun Yat-sen's Guomindang government at Guangzhou submitted a claim for a share of the 'Customs Surplus'. They argued that since some of the Customs revenue was collected in ports under their government's jurisdiction, they should receive a pro rata share of this surplus. The local authorities under the Qing had been allowed to retain a share of the Customs revenue, but the foreign control under the 1912 Agreement led to a distortion of the distribution, in favour of the warlord-controlled government in Beijing. Ignorance probably prevented other regional authorities from staking a similar claim to Sun's. At all events, their claim was ignored, whereupon they threatened to take over the foreign-managed Customs at Guangzhou. The powers responded by threatening reprisals. Sun's government did not force the issue. Although this time Guangzhou failed to obtain a share of the Customs surplus, the powers were moved by this episode to recognize the injustice of giving the Beijing government, which controlled less than half of the country at this point, the whole of the Customs surplus. The Diplomatic Body also began to consider the force of the southern complaint, that the Customs revenue which was collected in the south was supplied to the northern government, which then used it to make war on the south.

As a result, the Diplomatic Body refused to give Beijing the 2 million taels it requested from the Surplus, citing the civil war between north and south as the reason. After hostilities ceased in January 1919, the Diplomatic Body authorized a grant of 12 million taels to Beijing, on the understanding that the money would either be devoted to certain specific and approved objectives, including a number of projects for the benefit of the people in southern China, or be disposed of jointly by the two governments. But by March 1919, frustrated at still not having received a share of the revenue, the Guomindang government once more threatened to interfere with the Guangzhou Customs. The powers reacted as on the previous occasion, and the threat did not materialize.

Owing to the lack of a positive solution to the problem of the sharing of the Customs Surplus, the Beijing government failed to obtain the sanction of the Diplomatic Body for further grants from this fund. Frustrated, the Beijing government pressed, in July 1919, for the revision of the 1912 Agreement, with a view to eliminating foreign control over the disposal of the Customs Surplus. This was opposed by both France and Japan, and Beijing's bid failed.

Shortly afterwards, increasingly anxious to gain possession of the large Customs Surplus which was accumulating, Beijing admitted for the first time Guangzhou's claim for a share of this fund, in its grant application to the Diplomatic Body. This time the foreign representatives gave their consent. Having regard to the Customs income from the ports in the Guomindang controlled area, its government at Guangzhou was given a pro rata share of 13.7% of the total Customs Surplus of about 21 million Shanghai taels, while Beijing got the rest. The payment to Sun's government continued until it was toppled by a coup in March 1920. After Sun returned to power in August 1920, his government again requested payment of the 'southern quota' of the Customs Surplus. But towards the end of that year, the Diplomatic Corps and I.G. Aglen made up their minds that financial support for Sun's government was harmful to the prospect of unity in China. They therefore made no further payment to the Guangzhou regime, which for its part continued to demand to be paid its share of the Customs Surplus, including the arrears from March 1920 onwards. Each refusal aroused the Guomindang to threaten to take over the foreign-managed Guangzhou Customs, but the foreign threat of reprisals, and a naval demonstration of the warships of Britain, America, France, Italy and Japan in Guangzhou harbour in December 1923, deterred the Guomindang from forcing the issue.

After China entered World War I on August 12, 1917 on the side of the allied powers, the I.G. took it upon himself to release funds in his custody to the Chinese government in Beijing, without the intervention of the Diplomatic Corps. These funds resulted from the cancellation of the Boxer Indemnity due to the belligerents, Germany and Austria. As a reward to China for participating in the War, the allied powers deferred their Boxer Indemnity payments for five years from December 1917 to November 1922. Together they arranged to have the funds, due to them from the Customs revenue, transferred directly from the foreign custodian banks to the I.G., who was appointed by the Beijing government to receive the money as its agent.

The I.G. used his financial clout and influence to ensure that these funds were used to pay for the service and redemption of certain Chinese government's domestic loans with which he was closely associated. The domestic loans issued with Francis Aglen's support were usually successful, because he made sure that there were funds for their service and redemption, even though, on quite a few occasions, he had to thwart the demands of angry Chinese officials and warlords, who wanted him to divert funds which he

had set aside to provide security for such loans. The Beijing government, though chronically short of the \$50,000,000 or so administrative expenses needed to run its own establishment, was perennially pressured by the militarists who controlled it to provide for their, often dire, short-term financial needs. A large number of unsecured or poorly secured loans were floated by this government under various warlord regimes.

#### *4.5 I.G. Aglen's consolidation of domestic loans*

In 1921, Francis Aglen joined the Chinese banking interests in selecting a number of these outstanding domestic loan issues which were in danger of default, and in consolidating them into a single debt. He persuaded the government to create a National Consolidated Debt Office with himself at the head, to take responsibility for the service of this debt using the 'Customs Surplus'. Although the Beijing government would have preferred to have the 'Customs Surplus' for its own use, because of the difficulty caused by the claim of the Guomindang regime in Guangzhou for a share of this revenue, it agreed to the I.G.'s scheme. Giving security to so much outstanding domestic debt restored the credit of the Beijing government with the Chinese bondholders. Later, with Francis Aglen's help, the Beijing government was able to raise more money through floating more domestic loans. It also freed some other sources of revenue for the disposal of this government. Because of these financial and other advantages, the competition for control of Beijing among the warlords was fierce.

What was Francis Aglen's motive for using the Customs Surplus to secure and consolidate China's domestic debt? First, it saved him from having to deal with the politically explosive issue of sharing out this revenue between the governments of north and south. Secondly, he hoped that the Chinese banking interests that benefited from this scheme would provide him and the foreign Customs organization with a Chinese 'anchor', if and when the foreign powers, Britain in particular, decided not to use force to protect the MCS and his position in it. This was a distinct possibility, as imperialism was forced to retreat in the face of militant Chinese nationalism in the 1920s.

#### *4.6 The Washington surtaxes, the abolition of lijin, and tariff autonomy*

Further attempts to put the Chinese government's finances in order were made at the American sponsored Washington Conference that was held from November 12, 1921 to February 2, 1922 at Washington with nine nations participating – the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and China. (For a standard work on this subject, see Westel W. Willoughby, *China at the*

*Conference A Report*, Baltimore, 1922). At this conference, the financially strained Beijing government pressed for concessions from the treaty powers on Customs tariffs. Its delegates presented an irrefutable case for adjusting the treaty tariff, which had been based on prices which prevailed several decades back under the Qing, to the current market value of the goods traded. In the spring of 1922, a Tariff Revision Commission, composed of delegates of all the treaty powers and China, met in Shanghai, and it successfully carried out the upward revision of the treaty tariff to an effective 5% ad valorem, taking the market values during the 6-month period from October 1921 to March 1922 as the basis for calculating the new tariff rates.

The Washington Treaty Powers also agreed a surtax of 2.5% on ordinary imports and 5% on luxuries, known as the Washington surtaxes, to be granted to China at a special tariff conference to be held after the treaty was ratified by all of the nine countries attending this conference. This concession was to be tied to the abolition of *lijin*, a local transit tax of variable rates, collected largely by the local authorities for their own use, rather than by the foreign-controlled MCS. This tax, disliked by Chinese and foreigners alike, was introduced in the 1850s to finance the war against the Taiping. The Chinese delegates regarded the Washington surtaxes as a temporary piecemeal remedy for China's financial difficulties. The real solution had to come from ending the system of treaty tariffs, which meant China gaining tariff autonomy. (For an authoritative work on this subject written by an officer of the MCS, see Stanley F. Wright, *China's Struggle for Tariff Autonomy: 1843 – 1938*.) Tariff autonomy was a plank of the Chinese rights recovery programme, which aimed at the liquidation of the entire treaty system and all the vestiges of foreign domination and control of China. All of these issues on Chinese Customs tariff were to be resolved at a special conference in the near future.

Although the Beijing government wanted to hold the Special Tariff Conference as soon as possible in order to obtain the Washington surtaxes, it was delayed by France's refusal to ratify the Washington Treaty unless China agreed to pay their portion of the Boxer Indemnity in gold, rather than the greatly depreciated post-war French paper currency. The same demand was made by Belgium and Italy. Finally, in October 1925, the 'Provisional' government at Beijing, dominated at this point by the warlord, Duan Qirui, was able to convene this conference, after he agreed, despite Chinese public outcry against it, to pay the European nations in gold dollars.

During this conference, the fact that China was divided into warring factions, with a fictitious central government in Beijing, was a problem in itself. A basic question attached to the granting of the Washington surtaxes to China, was: who should benefit from the surtaxes? The answer to this question would depend on the arrangements made for the collection, custody and disposal of the revenue from the surtaxes. Before a provincial distribution system could be worked out, if the foreign-controlled MCS were to collect it, the

bulk of the revenue would go the Beijing government controlled by a warlord faction. This would antagonize the Guomindang and other regional warlord regimes. If the MCS was bypassed, it could spell the beginning of the end of the MCS, which was considered an important foreign asset, and an adjunct of the treaty system by the powers, especially Great Britain.

On the subject of the abolition of *lijin*, the Chinese demanded additional surtaxes, to compensate for the revenue shortfall, and this was also to be a step toward tariff autonomy. The powers agreed on the principle of the surtaxes, but had difficulty seeing eye-to-eye as regards their rates, custody, and disposal. The powers' disagreements on these and other issues prevented a positive decision from being reached on the subject of granting the Washington surtaxes to China, before this conference petered out sometime between April and June 1926. During this time, the 'Provisional' government, which had sponsored this conference, ceased to exist, as a result of changes in the balance of power in north China, after a period of active hostility among the leading warlords controlling northern and central China.

Before the conference ended, the Chinese delegates, propelled by nationalism and financial exigencies, made a strong bid for tariff autonomy. They succeeded, with the help of the Chinese press and the agitations of many citizens' organizations and pressure groups in Beijing, during the time when the conference delegates were discussing this subject. The conference passed a resolution recognizing 'China's right to enjoy tariff autonomy', and agreeing that China's National Tariff Law should go into effect on January 1, 1929. On the same date, *lijin* would be simultaneously abolished. This resolution paved the way for tariff autonomy and the abolition of *lijin* a few years later, under the Guomindang government at Nanjing.

#### 4.7 Chinese disappointment at Versailles

As China remained mired in the hopelessly demoralizing world of warlord contention, World War I ended in Europe with the armistice of November 11, 1918 and Germany's defeat. The Chinese were jubilant. An excited crowd, in triumphal mood, rushed to demolish the memorial, which the Qing had been forced to erect, for the remembrance of the Germans killed by the Boxers. Patriotic Chinese had high expectations from the Paris Peace Conference, which began in January 1919, on the matter of China regaining her sovereign rights which had been yielded to the Germans by the Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century under duress. Having participated in the war effort on the side of the allied powers, they hoped that these nations, which had expressed verbal support for China's sovereignty and territorial integrity for many years, would agree to restore to China the German sphere of influence in Shandong, and all rights conceded to Germany in connection with it.

The large Chinese delegation that represented the two provisional Chinese governments at Beijing and Guangzhou (Sun Yat-sen's revived Guomindang) was utterly unprepared for the shocking revelations with



which they were confronted at Versailles. The chief of the Japanese delegate announced that in return for Japanese naval assistance to the allied powers, Britain, Italy, and France, had signed, early in 1917, a secret treaty that assured Japan of their support for 'Japan's claims in regard to the disposal of the German rights in Shandong' after the war. Compounding the bad news, the Japanese informed the conference delegates of secret agreements concluded in September 1918 with Duan Qirui's government, which gave the Japanese the right to station police and troops in Jinan and Qingdao, and mortgaged to them the income of two new railways they planned to construct in Shandong, as partial payment for Japanese loans. In the light of these disclosures, President Woodrow Wilson of America, who had previously been sympathetic to China's claim to recover her rights in Shandong, agreed to join, on April 30, 1919, Britain's David Lloyd George, and France's Georges Clemenceau, in authorizing the transfer to Japan of all Germany's rights in Shandong. This great power decision put the Chinese delegation in a hopeless position, however well they had put forward China's case at the conference.

When the news reached China on May 1<sup>st</sup>, patriotic Chinese were outraged by the double betrayal of the Western powers and the Duan Qirui's government. Hundreds of Chinese political and commercial associations, and Chinese communities and students overseas, showered the Chinese delegates with telegrams protesting against the decision at Versailles and petitioning them not to sign. On the day the Chinese delegates were due to sign the treaty document, Chinese demonstrators and students surrounded their hotel, preventing them from attending the signing ceremony. Finally, a belated telegram arrived from the Chinese President, instructing them not to sign<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> At this point neither China and nor the world could have anticipated that the United States of America would sponsor a conference in Washington, between November 1921 and February 1922, with stabilization of the international situation in east Asia, through limiting Japan's post-war gains, as its primary objective. As we have seen, the Washington Conference was also concerned with China's Custom tariffs. The Nine-Power Treaty signed at the Washington Conference condemned the spheres of influence in China, and agreed to respect China's sovereignty, independence, territorial and administrative integrity. Thanks to a new post-war liberalism prevailing in Japan around 1917-1925, which led to a shift in her foreign policy, Japan was in a cooperative mood at this conference. She signed the Washington Treaty that obliged her to withdraw her notorious Twenty-one Demands from China, and to return to China what she had seized from the former German sphere of influence in Shandong. In exchange for Japan's concessions, the powers accepted the status quo of Japan's earlier acquisition in southern Manchuria. This was all in the future, however. In May 1919, the Chinese were reacting to the Treaty of Versailles.

## 5. Reform Movements

### 5.1 *The May Fourth movement*

Indignation at the treaty settlement, and concern about the mounting Japanese encroachment on China, moved the student activists in Beijing to bring forward to May 4<sup>th</sup> the date for a demonstration, which had been planned for May 7<sup>th</sup> as the ‘National Humiliation Day’, to protest Japan’s ‘Twenty-One Demands’ regarding the transfer of German rights in Shandong to Japan. On that day, over 3000 student activists from Beijing University and many other institutions of higher education gathered at Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace) in a highly-charged mood, aroused by the Japanese threat, and fired by a determination to resist with statements on a manifesto, such as ‘our country is about to be annihilated’, and ‘the Chinese people may be massacred, but they will not surrender’. Then they started marching towards the foreign-legation quarter. Along the way, they handed out leaflets to passers-by, to inform them about the issue concerning Shandong, and to alert them to China’s plight. After being stopped by police and foreign guards, they marched instead to the home of the Minister of Communications, who had negotiated huge loans from Japan. Finding him away, they vented their rage by setting fire to his house, and gave a high pro-Japanese official, whom they looked upon as a ‘traitor’, a severe beating. As a result of their clashes with the police, one student died in hospital from a serious injury, and 32 were arrested.

Following the demonstration, the students at Beijing formed a student union which included middle- and high-school students of both sexes. The inclusion of females was significant as an expression of support for co-education, in these early years of female education in single-sex schools in China. Even Beijing University itself only admitted women on 1920. Soon students of other major cities in China established similar student unions, and by June, representatives of thirty student unions from all over China met, and organized a Student Union of the Republic of China for co-ordinating their political activities. As successors of the scholar-gentry-officials, who were the ruling elites of traditional China, students in modern educational establishments looked upon themselves as potential leaders of the Chinese society, responsible for China’s future. They emerged as a new political force. Their example inspired others in the scholarly professions, such as teachers, writers, and journalists, to organize themselves into similar associations for political purposes.

The student activists, so organized, continued with their agitations in all parts of China, boycotting Japanese goods, making speeches in the streets to mobilize public support, and working frequently in small ‘Groups of Ten for National Salvation’. In late May and early June, they called a strike that closed the schools in more than 200 cities all over China. In June, the warlord government in Beijing tried to suppress these agitations by force. It arrested around 1150 of the student activists, and locked them up, using a part of the

University of Beijing as a prison. This provoked not only the girl students to march in the streets, but also patriotic responses from other segments of the society. In Shanghai alone, the merchants closed their shops for a week and, even without labour unions, around 60,000 workers from more than forty enterprises went on strike in sympathetic support for the students. The active nation-wide protests by all segments of the society led the Beijing government to make concessions. It dismissed the three pro-Japanese officials. The cabinet resigned, while the incarcerated students marched out in triumph.

## *5.2 The coming of age of Chinese nationalism*

For many reasons, the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement is seen as a significant landmark in the development of Chinese nationalism, a phenomenon which had begun long before May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, and would continue into the future. The anti-imperialist demonstrations against Japan, which started on May 4<sup>th</sup> in Beijing, were only one facet of its expression. Although the origin of modern nationalism is traceable to the emergence of nation-states from Medieval Christendom in Europe, after centuries of warfare on that continent, the peoples of Asia and Africa, who had experienced Western or Japanese imperialism, also developed nationalism in a modern world context. As a complex phenomenon, modern nationalism seems capable of being expressed in a variety of ways through different channels, depending on the interaction between the dominant powers(s) and the colonial peoples, and on the history, culture, and social institutions of the latter. In general, nationalism involves consciousness of individuals or groups of people of a certain area, of a common ethnic identity and a larger loyalty that transcends the narrower familial, class, and other parochial loyalties. Individuals with nationalistic inclinations can be readily recruited to serve causes identified with the good of the nation. Expressions of nationalism of a subject people often involve intellectual and emotional commitment to a body of ideas, a programme, or a political party, or all three, which promotes the cause of liberating the nation – ethnic group or geographical entity – to which they are attached, from foreign domination. Sometimes national liberation is interpreted more broadly to include liberation from the oppressive ideas, traditions, and institutions of a nation's past, and for the attainment of certain common goals for the future. For two years or more after the May 4<sup>th</sup> anti-imperialist agitations, a 'New Cultural Movement', precipitated by the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, swept over China like a giant wave, with far-reaching effects on China's development.

The 'New Cultural Movement' was yet another movement along the road of China's struggle to survive, and to renew herself in a world dominated by modernized nations which had been preying on her since the 1840s. It was a renewed attempt to identify China's weaknesses, and the strategies to be used to address these shortcomings.

For half a century, the leaders of China had diagnosed the problem as one of lacking military strength, after witnessing the power of the British gunboats and guns, and how easy it was for the British to inflict devastating blows against Chinese forces using such military hardware. The way to address the problem was, first, to purchase these from Western nations, and then build factories to produce the same in China. When this approach proved insufficient, they supplemented it with western training and drilling of the troops, together with modern weapons, to create a more up-to-date armed force with which to counter Western and Japanese aggression. During this period of 'Self-strengthening' the Chinese were willing to adopt from the West what proved useful and necessary to them, like military technology and railways, but they wanted the essential aspects of China's culture and way of life to remain unchanged.

### *5.3 Political reform: from constitutional monarchy to democratic republic*

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the limited 'Self-strengthening' measures had failed to make China sufficiently strong militarily against the modern imperialistic nations, which had by then grown even more rapacious towards China. Nationalistic gentry and officials, with the transformation of Meiji Japan in mind, persuaded the desperate Qing emperor that China could be made strong and wealthy by adopting certain political, administrative and economic reform measures. This movement was an expression of the nationalism of the Chinese gentry-officials. In contrast to the earlier generation of 'self-strengtheners', they favoured making more thoroughgoing changes in China, through following Japan's example of learning from the West. A central plank of this reform movement was the introduction of constitutional monarchy. This movement was abortive, because ultimate power resided, at that time, in the hands of a conservative Qing clique, which opposed such reforms.

Subsequently, a new revolutionary nationalism of the rising Chinese bourgeoisie, and other modernizing elements in Chinese society, had brought about the Revolution of 1911. In the wake of this revolution, conservative power-holders had destroyed China's prospects of becoming a democratic republic, governed by elected officials under the rule of law sanctioned by a written constitution, although such a republic was what many patriotic participants of the Revolution of 1911 had wanted to build. Instead of the dawn of a new era, the aftermath of this revolution brought the Chinese nationalists a sense of disillusionment from the abortive experiment with constitutional government and democracy, and a feeling of despair from China's descent into warlordism, while imperialism raged on, with Japan taking centre stage as the dominant imperial power in China.

With China in the grip of warlordism and Japanese imperialism, a new generation of revolutionary nationalists, grappling with the old problem of China's survival and revitalization in the modern world,

came to the conclusion that China's old culture and tradition was at the root of the problem. Confucianism came under attack. Its hierarchical 'Three Bonds' subordinated the subject to the ruler, the son to the father, and the wife to the husband, with the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, and obedience, corresponding to the most important of the Confucian 'Five Relationships'. These were regarded by the new revolutionaries as relics of the past oppression of women by men, of the young by their elders, and of subjects by despotic rulers. These and a host of old China's traditional ideas and practices were rejected by these forward-looking Chinese, who held up Western ideas of progress, egalitarianism, feminism, and individualism as their new norms. The May 4<sup>th</sup> generation of Chinese reformers wanted a thorough overhaul of China's culture. It was wrenching to have to turn against one's culture and traditions, and it was far from easy to decide what new ideas, values, or cultural models were appropriate for China. These Chinese stepped into the market place of the intellectual and cultural world of the West with their minds wide open, shopping for the most suitable ideas and models to remake the Chinese society. The tremendous intellectual ferment of the 'New Cultural Movement' was a culmination of this search for a new path for China.

The impetus for this movement came from the University of Beijing, where young professors and students produced many influential books, and translations of Western works. Soon reform-minded people all over China were caught up in this intellectual ferment. They formed associations and brought out publications to propagate their ideas, or for some other purposes. A large number of new periodicals and newspapers appeared on the scene, and spread all over China, though some only briefly, carrying informative articles, discussing a wide range of cultural topics and social problems, and exploring many new ideas from abroad, from Social Darwinism to Marxism. They were mostly written in the speech-like vernacular, so that the messages could also reach the less educated. These were powerful vehicles used by the reformers, to widen the circle of the participants across regions and social classes in the search for China's renewal.

Eminent foreign scholars were invited to China to teach. John Dewey spent two years (May 1919-July 1921) on a lecture tour through eleven provinces, with Hu Shi interpreting. He stimulated interest among the Chinese for his educational philosophy, and his ideas about pragmatism. Bertrand Russell lectured in China, from October 1920-July 1921, advocating state socialism, a subject that was drawing the attention of Chinese radicals.

The Chinese who turned against China's traditional culture were attracted by a wide range of Western cultural expressions. Some were drawn to the traditional Western arts and culture, others to the modern and avant-garde. These preferences and choices lay in the realm of the development and tastes of individuals. They also showed a broadening of the Chinese intellectual landscape that opened up new possibilities in art, literature and other areas of contemporary Chinese culture. Development of the individual aside, most reformers focused their attention on the larger and urgent issues of societal change.

There was a group of reformers who favoured a rational, pragmatic and piece-by-piece approach to engineer changes in China. They wanted to concentrate on problem solving, to analyze the problems critically, and then prescribe a cure for each. A leading exponent of this approach was Hu Shi, who was a professor of philosophy at Beijing University. Hu had won a scholarship funded by the American Boxer Indemnity to receive a university education in America, where he studied philosophy and became a student of John Dewey at one point. In his view, 'perfecting' China was going to be a long-term process of evolutionary changes. It was to be achieved through educating her people, building new institutions of learning, spreading knowledge of modern science, and establishing democratic institutions. He was skeptical of socialism and other doctrinaire approaches to 'liberate' or totally transform China in one stroke.

It was impossible for the reform agenda of the gradualists to make any headway in warlord-controlled China. The Beijing government under their control ignored their manifestoes for guaranteeing civil liberties. Their impact on the society was greater in the realm of culture, particularly as they actively promoted the vernacular, a simple and direct speech-like style of writing. From this time onward, Chinese literature was written in the vernacular rather than in the older literary style. As regards remaking China, the approach of the pragmatists seemed too slow and cerebral for many hot-blooded young Chinese, witnessing their country ravaged by warlordism, and menaced by imperialism of an even more virulent kind from Japan, and seeing their people descending further into impoverishment. They had had enough of just thinking, talking and writing; they were ready for political actions, using not just their pens, but also their fists, as they had no guns.

This was a dispiriting time for the Chinese people, whose hope for a brighter future seemed to elude them perpetually. Lu Xun, the most distinguished writer of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, had a pessimistic vision of the Chinese as a people who had fallen asleep in a great iron box and were in danger of suffocation, if they were not woken up. It was his mission to keep on banging on this great box from the outside, until the sleepers inside were wakened. Even if they woke up and became conscious of their impending doom, unless they managed to free themselves, he was not certain whether they would be able to escape their fate.

Just around this time, a ray of hope appeared to the eagerly searching, and increasingly radicalized, young educated activists of the May 4<sup>th</sup> generation. It came from the direction of the Soviet Union, which was established in October 1917, after the Bolsheviks successfully seized power in Russia.

#### *5.4 Radicals: Marxist-Leninist revolution in the Soviet mould*

Marxism did not attract much attention at first from the Chinese activists, because this theory applies to a Communist-led revolution of an urban proletariat overthrowing the ruling establishment of a capitalist country. China was far from being a capitalist country during that time. But since Russia, having a large peasantry, was not exactly a typically mature, largely urbanized capitalist country either, Lenin's success might have lessons for the Chinese. In January 1918, a Guomindang newspaper in Shanghai paid tribute to the Russian revolution, and Sun Yat-sen sent a personal note of congratulation to Lenin.

The developments in Russia excited Beijing University's young head librarian, Li Tazhao. Li was born into a peasant family in 1889. In order to acquire a modern education, he had to sell his meagre family possessions. Having studied political economy in Japan, and won distinction as a writer and editor, he was appointed to the above-mentioned librarianship in February 1918, at China's most prestigious educational institution. Li saw in the Soviet Union the 'dawn of the new civilization of the world' that was founded on 'freedom and humanism', and that might 'mediate between the East and the West' in view of its geographical location. Because of its relative slowness (by comparison with England and France) in evolving into a modern civilization, there was more energy and scope for it to surge upward. Li expected to see the Soviet Union at the head of a surging tide of development, which the Chinese should welcome and embrace. After publishing his 'salutation' to the Russian Revolution in June 1918, Li proceeded to set up an informal group, consisting mostly of faculty members and students of the university, to study Marxism. By the end of 1918, it came to be known as the 'Marxist Research Society', where Li led analytical discussion of Marx's *Capital*, among others.

Among the dozen or so of the regular attendants was Chen Duxiu, the dean of Beijing University. Born into a wealthy official family in 1879, Chen had a good traditional education in the Classics, before the emergence of modern schools in China. Like many Chinese of his time, Chen spent some time studying in Japan and participating in radical political societies. In 1915, he became the founder and editor of the *New Youth* to propagate progressive ideas, and to liberate China from the fetters of Confucianism. In China's traditional society, the family was the basic unit, and the individuals in it were expected to assume obligations attached to their roles in accordance with the Confucian ethics, and to suppress their individual egos in order to fit harmoniously into this hierarchically ordered microcosm. The larger world outside the family replicated and magnified this microcosm to enlarge it to the level of a state, the head of which would have the role of the supreme patriarch. This great father figure would naturally rule benevolently and wisely, being supported by a system of ethics assumed to be universal and immanent. By contrast, in the modern Western society, the basic unit was the individual, who had recognized human rights and freedoms buttressed by the rule of law, and social equality was held up as an ideal to strive towards. From the point of view of social Darwinism, which educated Chinese, like Chen, had become familiar with, Chen feared

that the traditional Chinese system of morality and governance rendered China unfit for the competition in the fierce struggle for existence. In order to save China, Chen advocated wholesale borrowing from the West. Like his colleague and friend, Hu Shi, Chen wanted see 'Mr. Science' and 'Mr. Democracy' playing major roles in China's transformation. He also actively supported and popularised the vernacular style of writing. During the May 4<sup>th</sup> student demonstration, Chen was imprisoned for three months for handing out 'inflammatory' leaflets, which demanded rights of free speech and assembly, and the resignation of the pro-Japanese ministers.

After participating in Li Dazhao's study group, Chen developed an enthusiasm for Marxism. He turned over the May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1919 issue of the *New Youth* to Li to edit. Besides other scholarly articles on Marxism, Li's 'My Marxist Views' provided a penetrating and critical analysis of the concept of class struggle and the problem of capitalist exploitation. As the most influential journal in China of that time, it was expected to reach a wide readership.

However, in applying Marxism to China's situation, the smallness of China's modern industrial sector meant the lack of a large urban proletariat, which, according to Marxist orthodoxy, was to be the main force behind a revolution led by the communist party, as the vanguard of their class. In order to get around this problem, early in 1920, Li developed a theory that drew a parallel between the exploitation of the workers of the industrialized countries by their capitalists, and the exploitation of the people of China by the foreign imperialists. According to Li, this process was gradually turning the people of the entire country into a part of the world proletariat. He went on to claim that being exploited indirectly by foreign capitalists was a more bitter experience than the direct exploitation by the capitalists of one's own nation. As regards the Russians and the Chinese in their revolutionary activism, he drew another parallel. Considering both countries had large peasant populations, he urged the Chinese students and intellectuals to go to the countryside to investigate the situation there, and to educate and liberate the peasants, like their Russian predecessors in earlier phases of the Russian revolution. Many answered his call, as his study group grew in popularity. By the early 1920s the students of Beijing University established a 'Mass Education and Speech Corps' for this purpose.

### *5.5 The founding of the Chinese Communist Party*

The study of Marxism provided young radicalized Chinese with a theoretical foundation on which to base a political movement. In 1920, Lenin gave the Chinese an impetus to take political action by sending two agents, Grigori Voitinsky and Yang Mingzhai to China, after he had set up the Third International of the Communist Party (the Comintern) in 1919, for promoting socialist revolutions in the world at large. By 1920, Lenin himself took the view that it was not necessary for backward countries to reach the capitalist



stage before a socialist revolution could take place, if they had the help of the Soviet Union. He even approved of setting up peasant soviets and forming temporary alliances with bourgeois democratic parties in these countries. After the two Comintern agents reached Beijing, they contacted Li Dazhao. Li referred them to Chen Duxiu, who had by then settled in the French Concession in Shanghai. When they met Chen in May 1920, Chen was still restlessly exploring various socialist options for a practical way to help China. The Comintern agents offered him guidance on knitting the different socialist groups together into a tightly organized political party. During the same month, a group of radicals that included socialists, progressives, anarchists, and Guomindang members met. They formed the core of a potential Communist party, and Chen became the provisional secretary of the central committee of this nascent organization.

During the following months, there was a flurry of activities that had important consequences for the future of China. With the aid of the Comintern agents, a Sino-Russian news agency and language school were established as cover for recruitment, and for teaching Russian to young Chinese radicals so as to prepare them for training in Russia as revolutionary organizers. A socialist youth league and a monthly magazine were also founded to spread the movement far and wide. Communist groups began to appear in Beijing, Hubei, among Chinese students in Japan, and elsewhere.

In Hunan, Mao Zedong, who was born into a rich peasant family in Hunan in 1897, and who would later tower over China for about a half a century, was embracing Marxism and turning himself into an active Communist. As a youth, Mao had rebelled against his father, rejecting a life on the family farm and an arranged marriage with the daughter of a neighbour. After serving for a short time in the Qing army in 1911, he immersed himself in studying the works of Western Enlightenment thinkers translated by Yan Fu and Chinese political philosophers, among others. He majored in ethics, after being accepted as a student by the highly regarded First Normal School in Changsha. In 1919, Mao moved to Beijing to be near his former ethics teacher, who had become a professor at Beijing University. In Beijing, Mao attended the 'Marxist Research Group' led by Li Dazhao, and did clerical work in the library of the university. During most of 1920, Mao drifted between Beijing and Shanghai, reading and participating in discussion groups on the *Communist Manifesto* and other works of Marx that had been translated into Chinese, while working for a spell as a laundryman. After accompanying a group of influential Guomindang officials to Hunan, he was appointed as the director of a primary school in Changsha. During the autumn of that year, with the financial support of a proper salary, he married Yang Kaihui, the daughter of his former teacher. It was also around this time that he established a Communist cell in Changsha. He soon gained prominence in Hunanese politics as a writer, editor, and leader of workers' guilds.

Between 1919 and 1920, over 1000 Chinese students joined a work-study programme in France, and Zhou Enlai was amongst them. Zhou had been imprisoned for raiding a local government office early in 1919,

and he later led the May 4<sup>th</sup> student protest in Tianjin. Deng Xiaoping, from Sichuan, who graduated from high school at sixteen and went to France after a year of learning French, had the distinction of being the youngest. Many young radicals from Hunan, who were friends of Mao Zedong, and who had taken part in anti-warlord, anti-Japanese or pro-labour agitations went to France. Mao might have gone there himself, if he had had the means or the connections to do so. Notable among the Hunan contingent was Xiang Jingyu, who was an ardent feminist as well as a socialist. She and a fellow Hunanese announced their 'revolutionary' marriage by being photographed holding a copy of Marx's *Capital*. Paris and Lyons, especially the former, were the centres of the Chinese students' activities. They were a lively lot, taking their political activism to France. Radical students from Hunan and Sichuan published underground journals of their own. Deng Xiaoping was given a 'honorary' title of doctor of mimeography for being zealous in these endeavours. In 1921, both Zhou and Deng joined the Communist party in France. They were successful in their drive to recruit Chinese in Europe to join the Communist party.

In July 1921, the tiny Chinese Communist party (CCP) called a plenary meeting in Shanghai, to which Mao Zedong was invited as the representative from Hunan. The meeting first took place in the French Concession, at the top of a girls' school in summer recess. After discovering snoopers, the delegates moved to meet on a boat in a lake in Zhejiang, in the presence of a new agent from the Comintern, known by his pseudonym as Maring, who had replaced the earlier ones. The thirteen delegates representing around sixty CCP members in China (not counting the ones abroad), discussed the burning issues of the time, and concluded with a statement that strongly reflected the Soviet agenda and Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, as represented by Maring, rather than the objective conditions on the ground in China. The statement emphasized the central role of the proletariat, which must be led by a 'militant and disciplined Party' representing it. Translated into action, it meant that the Chinese Communist party was to become a Soviet-style highly disciplined party, if it was not yet one, and that it must actively enrol urban industrial workers into the party, and lead them into militant actions. Moreover, the proletariat was required to play the leading part in the bourgeois democratic movement which, in China, was led by the Guomindang.

If the Communist party was to carry out this programme, it would either have to take over the leadership of this movement from the Guomindang or lead the Guomindang itself. How could the small and weak Communist party achieve this? At this point, that possibility did not exist. The practical choice available to the party delegates to decide, was whether or not to ally their party with the Guomindang. They carried out prolonged debates on this matter. Some were against forming an alliance with the Guomindang because this party, and their own, each represented a class that opposed the other. The majority of the delegates declared that while they should be wary of Sun Yat-sen's teachings, his 'various practical and progressive actions should be supported, by adopting forms of non-Party collaboration'. This decision paved the way

for members of the Communist party to collaborate with the Guomindang later. For some reason, both Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao did not attend this meeting. Chen was elected the secretary-general of the CCP *in absentia*.

After the delegates returned to the provinces and cities they represented, they reported to their constituents, and carried out recruitment and pursued the party agenda where possible. Although by 1922, the CCP had only about 200 members, not counting those abroad, a beginning had been made. During that year many Chinese Communists from France returned home. Among those was Xiang Jingyu, who turned out to be skilful in organizing woman workers, many of whom worked in large spinning and weaving mills. Working in general for less than their male counterparts and in grim conditions, they represented a segment of the proletariat ready to be recruited and guided by the Communist party. As regards the cause for gender equality that Xiang Jingyu also strove for, the outcome was not so positive. While her husband was promptly elected to the Central Committee, she remained on the sidelines, with posts on women's activities. Having had two children, one in 1922 and another in 1924, Xiang was not able to do full-time party work. Despite Mao Zedong crediting women for 'holding up a half of the sky', gender equality was an unrealized ideal then, and still is. Most of the leading government officials currently in the PRC are men, though women's position in the PRC has improved a great deal since 1949, when the PRC was founded.

### *5.6 The attractions of Marxism-Leninism*

Why had China's patriotic intellectuals and educated youths turned to Marxism-Leninism for China's salvation? One reason was the difficulty of transplanting Western institutions to China. Many of them felt frustrated by the lack of progress in transforming China into a modern nation, following the path of Japan. Constitutional monarchy and democracy had failed to take root in China. The drip-feed style of changing China by borrowing from the West, little by little, a piece at a time, as advocated by the pro-Western Hu Shi, seemed far too slow and emotionally unsatisfying, when rapid, urgent, and large-scale changes were needed. Another reason was their disillusionment with the West. The blood bath of World War I - a war fought largely among the imperialistic nations of the West for world domination - undermined their admiration for the West. They became more critical of Western values. They noticed the hypocrisy of Western nations that verbally espoused the principles of the sovereignty of independent nations, and of open diplomacy, but violated these same principles in their actions, when they gave the German rights in Shandong to Japan. As a victim of aggression and oppression at the hands of Western powers and Japan, the Chinese at first put most of the blame on themselves, on their own weaknesses, technological, political, economic, or cultural, as these were being identified. After being exposed to the theories of Marxism-Leninism, in works such as *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* by Lenin, the Chinese radicals blamed imperialism as practiced by Western capitalist nations and Japan for China's enthrallment. They

began to see that it was the international monopolistic capitalists that kept China weak and backward through their imperialist exploitation.

It was not difficult for these Chinese to find evidence of foreign imperialists' exploitation of China, which rendered Marxism-Leninism convincing. Both the CCP and the Guomindang were alarmed by the degree of foreign control of Chinese industries, commerce and mining. The following examples showed foreign domination of these important Chinese economic sectors in 1918: 77% of shipping, 77% of coal, and 100% of iron mining and production. By 1936, the Chinese position had not improved, as 63.2% of manufacturing, 86.6% of railways, 81% of transport, and 100% of public utilities were in foreign hands. The foreigners bought Chinese raw materials such as cotton, metal ores, and coal cheaply, while selling finished manufactured goods dearly. It was impossible for China to protect her young industries or to prevent foreign dumping, because of the low and fixed treaty tariffs. Foreign dumping of machine-made cotton yarns and cotton cloth on the Chinese market ruined rural China's cottage industry, and the subsidiary economic activities of farming families. China's import and export trade had chronic imbalances in favour of foreign imports. Workers in the new industries (both foreign and Chinese-owned) laboured long hours in grim conditions with meagre wages and no benefits to speak of.

Marxism helped the patriotic, left-leaning Chinese to reject the imperialist West using Western scientific thoughts, as 'historical materialism' claimed to be scientific. Since science was seen as the secret of the West's material superiority, this claim added to the credibility and authority of the Marxist theory of historical progression of societies, through the mechanism of class struggle between the ruling and the exploited classes, for the ownership of the means of production, in a sequence of stages from primitive, through slave-owning, feudal, and capitalist, to the socialist stage. As a political ideology it was appealing, not only because an extremely complex subject was reduced to something that was relatively easy to grasp, but it also provided a solution that might be achievable through political actions. The Marxist solution for resolving the conflict between the ruling and the exploited classes through abolition of private ownership of the means of production did not seem too problematic for China, since Chinese capitalism was not yet highly developed, and the capitalist class was relatively small. Although China's historical experience did not fit neatly into the Marxist slave-owning, feudal and capitalist stages of development, believers in the universal applicability of Marxism found ways of reconciling the discrepancies.

While Marxism appealed to the intellect of the Chinese radicals, Marxism-Leninism appealed to their emotional need for action. They were encouraged by the example of the Russian Communist Party in carrying out successfully a socialist revolution in a country that, like China, had a large peasant agricultural sector in its economy. The readiness of the Chinese to learn from the Russian experience of party organization, mass propaganda, and the techniques for seizing power, was met with an eagerness on the

part of the Leninist party to teach, because the Russian Communists were keenly interested in fostering socialist revolutions in other parts of the world. To the passionately patriotic youths of the May 4<sup>th</sup> generation, devoted to China's salvation and regeneration, the discipline, the dedication and self-sacrifice required by the Communist party was something they would gladly embrace. They had come to see their enemies as the homegrown and international capitalists, against whom they were to fight, and their friends as the oppressed urban workers and peasants with whom they were to unite, and whose interests they were to promote. They were ready for political action, particularly of the kind that would amount to a shortcut to renewing China by transforming her, through a revolution, into a socialist country in a new socialist era of the world.

Feelings of warmth and friendship among the Chinese towards the Soviet Union were further aroused in 1918 by the Russian offer to give up their sphere of influence in China's Northeast. In July 1919, from the Russian foreign office, Leo Karakhan put out a declaration that offered to give up all privileges under the old tsarist unequal treaties. In September 1920, he repeated the offer, with some modifications, as a basis for negotiation of a new treaty with China. The Russian offer to forsake these tsarist imperialist gains, partly out of their own lack of strength to maintain those tsarist positions, went a long way towards winning Chinese goodwill and trust.

## 6. The Nationalist Revolution

### *6.1 The Chinese Communists' search for a revolutionary partner, and Sun's failed attempts at national unification*

After the founding of the CCP in Shanghai in July 1921, branches were soon set up in Nanjing, Changsha, Jinan, Wuhan, Guangdong, Paris and Tokyo. In January 1922, Lenin called a congress of the 'Toilers of the Far East' in Moscow, to which both the CCP and Guomindang sent delegates. During a meeting between the sickly Lenin and the Chinese delegates, Lenin stated his view that China was in the stage of an anti-feudal (the warlords were considered 'feudal' remnants) and anti-imperialist national democratic revolution, as opposed to the socialist revolution that had occurred in Russia. It was his wish that the CCP and the Guomindang would cooperate to push forward the Chinese revolution. The leader of the CCP, Chen Duxiu, wanted to emulate the Soviet Union by using militant and organized workers (urban proletarians) to seize power and effect a socialist revolution in China, without having to go through the bourgeois democratic revolutionary stage, or to cooperate with the Guomindang, the ideology and class-orientation

of which were very different from those of the CCP. But he found his approach to be at odds with that of the Comintern.

Marxist orthodoxy apart, the Soviet Union considered the fledgling CCP, with only approximately 300 members in 1923, too small to lead the country. As a result, the Comintern ordered the CCP to work with the Guomindang led by Sun Yat-sen, whose prestige as a great veteran revolutionary still had a lot of drawing power. It was in the Russian interest to have a strong China to help them secure their southern border against the fiercely anti-communist Japanese, bursting with aggressive ambitions in China. Although the Russians negotiated diplomatically with the warlord-controlled Beijing government, which recognized the Soviet Union in 1924, they could see that the principal northern warlords, Duan Qirui and Zhang Zuolin, were both in Japan's grip. They therefore pinned their hopes for the security of their southern border with China, and that of their railway through China's Northeast, on the rising Guomindang which, with the support of the Chinese Communists, might provide a check against the pro-Japanese warlords and the aggressive Japanese themselves. Soviet insistence overcame Chen Duxiu's and other CCP leaders' objections against cooperation with the Guomindang. So, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> CCP congress in 1922, the CCP declared that the Chinese revolution had to go through two stages: first the 'democratic revolution', and then the 'socialist revolution'. It was necessary for the CCP to form a 'united front' with the Guomindang and other democratic forces to achieve its goal of bringing about a united and independent China, through ridding China of warlordism and imperialism.

## *6.2 The first united front between the Guomindang and Chinese Communists*

In 1921, Maring went south to make contact with Sun Yat-sen and the Guomindang. After the failure of his campaign against Duan Qirui in 1917, Sun had retreated to Shanghai, where he spent some time writing down his political and economic ideas for China. In September 1919, he reorganized the Revolutionary Party of the Chinese Republic into the Nationalist Party of China (literally National People's Party), which was a move equivalent to reviving the Guomindang, with himself in overall command. In 1920, he directed the Guangdong warlord, Chen Jiongming, to drive out the warlords from the southwest. Chen's success enabled Sun to return to Guangzhou in November of that year. During April 1921, Sun called an extraordinary meeting of the Parliament, which elected him the 'extraordinary president', and planned once again to launch a military expedition for national unification. Like the southwest warlords before him, Chen Jiongming would not fall in with Sun's plan. In June 1922, instead of marching north, Chen's troops bombarded the presidential office. Sun retreated to a naval ship to fight Chen's forces for more than fifty days, before withdrawing

to Shanghai. Chiang Kai-shek, a young field officer in Chen's army, played a role in securing Sun's escape from Guangzhou.

At the time when Sun was preparing for his drive for reunification in Guangzhou in 1921, Maring contacted him and offered him financial and military aid from the Soviet Union, and suggested cooperation between the Guomindang and the CCP. After Sun returned to Shanghai in the autumn of 1922, many Comintern agents and CCP members contacted him. Sun needed help, and he had been seeking help from many foreign governments for a long time without success; he found the Russian offer of aid too good to refuse. However, he had reservations about state socialism for China, which needed to be addressed. He also did not want an alliance between the CCP and the Guomindang as parties, though he did not object to Communists joining the Nationalist party as individuals, in order to have an infusion of new blood to strengthen his organization. After Sun agreed to reorganize the Guomindang on 'democratic principles' in order to accommodate the Communists as members, Chen Duxiu led the way by joining this party that year. As regards state socialism, Comintern agents reassured Sun by stressing their common understanding of China's situation. In January 1923, Sun and a Soviet diplomat, Adolf Joffe, issued a joint statement as follows:

'Dr. Sun Yat-sen holds that the Communist order or even the Soviet system cannot actually be introduced into China, because there do not exist here the conditions for successful establishment of either Communism or Sovietism. This view is entirely shared by Mr. Joffe, who is further of the opinion that China's paramount and most pressing problem is to achieve national unification and attain full national independence, and regarding this great task, he has assured Dr. Sun Yat-sen that China has the warmest sympathy of the Russian people and can count on the support of Russia.'

With such an understanding, and further discussions with Comintern agents, Sun decided to accept Soviet help, and adopted an official policy that permitted Chinese Communists to join the Guomindang, which they did, after the 3<sup>rd</sup> CCP party congress in June 1923, which gave formal approval for party members to join the Guomindang.

In February 1923, a medley of militarists from several provinces of southern and central China forced Sun's enemy, Chen Jiongming, out of Guangzhou. For the third time Sun returned to Guangzhou to establish a military government with the aim of reuniting China through a military expedition to the north. Once again, he assumed the title of Grand Marshal. This time he did not work with the rump Parliament, because many of the parliamentarians had returned to Beijing. For the sake of keeping the appearance of

constitutional legality, the warlord-controlled Beijing government had induced them to go back, by offering each of them \$20 per meeting and a bonus of \$5000 for staying in Beijing and voting as directed. The government had ministries for domestic, finance, reconstruction, and foreign affairs. This was to be Sun's last attempt to form a government, but this time, because the Soviet Union came to his aid, he was to have far greater success. In October 6, 1923, a veteran Comintern agent, Borodin, arrived at Guangzhou to guide the relationship between the CCP and Guomindang, and to advise Sun.

In January 1924, after naming Borodin as his party's 'special adviser', Sun called the first national congress of the revived Guomindang in Guangzhou, which was attended by 165 delegates, with 15 of them Communists. The guiding principles of this party remained Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People: Nationalism (re-interpreted as anti-imperialism rather than anti-Manchu rule), Democracy, and People's Livelihood (which became 'socialism'). The congress adopted the three major strands of the party policy as: alliance with the Soviet Union, cooperation with Chinese Communists, and help and support for the farming and labouring masses. Sun was named as the party leader (*zongli*) for life. He delivered a public eulogy when the news of Lenin's death reached China while the congress was in session.

Borodin helped Sun to reorganize the Guomindang by strengthening Sun's position and tightening its disciplinary structure. The Guomindang adopted the Russian idea of 'democratic centralism' so that decisions passed by the majority of the relevant committees would become binding on all members. Borodin extended the party organization to the major cities with regional headquarters, and actively recruited new members. Many Chinese Communists were elected to its Central Executive Committee. In this powerful committee which ruled the party, Borodin created separate bureaus for dealing with the affairs of special segments of the society, such as women, youths, the military, rural and urban policy and recruitment. Communist members went about energetically organizing labour unions and spreading propaganda among the peasants. Borodin tried to persuade Sun to back an eight-hour working day with fair minimum wage for workers, and to redistribute the land of landlords to the peasants. Sun refused, because he did not want to antagonize his supporters among the property-owning classes, who were his important constituents. Some of Sun's overseas supporters were questioning the wisdom of his working so closely with the Soviet agents. Because the Comintern gave him the help he vitally needed, including strengthening his party organization, he was willing to overlook the risk of working with people whose vision of class war and state socialism he did not share.

### 6.3 A new party army



Another absolutely crucial new development was the establishment in June 1924, with Soviet help, of the Whampoa military academy, which was situated on the island of Whampoa about ten miles downstream from Guangzhou. The purpose of this academy was to train an officers' corps as the Guomintang's military arm. Considering that Sun had suffered repeated defeats through not having a military force at his own or his party's disposal, with officers loyal to him or following his political agenda, it was a major step to address that weakness. The warlord era was a period in China that fitted Mao Zedong's well-known observation that 'power issues from the barrel of a gun'.

The new military academy was to adopt the techniques developed by the Soviet Red Army to train the cadets, and to organize an army for military engagements. In order to learn the Soviet military methodology, Chiang Kai-shek went to Russia with a special Guomintang delegation and stayed there for several months. After his return, he was appointed the school's first commandant. The cadets were recruited from amongst middle school graduates of Guangdong and Hunan. This educational requirement effectively excluded the children of peasants and workers. Indeed, most of the cadets were from the middle class, antipathetic to communism and fiercely loyal to Chiang. There were, nevertheless, a few communists. Among them was the colourful Lin Biao, who was to have a splendid military career commanding the People's Liberation Army (PLA), until he flew, like Icarus, too close to the centre of power, and perished, after being named, for a brief period, as Mao's heir. Trying to keep a balance of influence between the Guomintang and the CCP in the academy, Borodin skilfully manoeuvred to have Zhou Enlai, who had just returned from France, to direct its political department. In addition to vigorous military training given by highly experienced Soviet instructors, the cadets also received thorough indoctrination on principles that guided the Guomintang and its nationalistic goals.

On October 15, 1924, the first class of 800 cadets commanded by Chiang Kai-shek (with the support of contingents of local police and cadets from some smaller provincial schools), demonstrated their prowess by defeating the Merchant Volunteer Corps which had fired on Guomintang demonstrators, and had attempted to seize a confiscated shipment of arms. In February 1925, with fresh supplies of rifles, machine guns and artillery from Russia, and with the advice of a Soviet veteran, Vasily Blyukher, Chiang's Whampoa cadet-led forces notched up a series of victories against the warlord Chen Jiongmeng, leading to the capture of Chen's main base at Shantou (Swatow) in March. Three months later, they defeated two other warlords, who had attempted to capture Guangzhou. These last engagements enabled them to capture 17,000 prisoners and 16,000 guns.

#### *6.4 The death of Sun Yat-sen*

The performance of this new army gave Sun hope that his vision of a Guomintang-led military expedition to unite China by getting rid of the scourge of warlordism might at last be realized. However, in January 1925, when he was in Beijing, accompanied by his wife Soong Qingling, Borodin and Wang Jingwei, to take part in a national reconstruction conference called by the warlord, Feng Yuxiang, he became seriously ill. After being operated upon, it was discovered that he had terminal liver cancer. He died in March 1925, age fifty-nine, leaving a last will and testament that was likely to have been drafted by Wang Jingwei. After his death, the Guomintang honoured Sun as the ‘father of the nation’ (*guo fu*), and his will was solemnly read out aloud on great state occasions.

Sun’s death had no effect on the consequences of the decisions and actions that had already been taken, which had a momentum of their own. Since he had not named or groomed an heir to inherit his mantle as the leader of Guomintang, his successor was a question begging for an answer. Prominent Guomintang members who had been close to him, Wang Jingwei, Hu Hanming and Liao Zhongkai were all possible candidates. Then there was Chiang Kai-shek, the head of the Whampoa Military Academy, who had risen in stature recently with the triumphs of the forces led by Whampoa cadets. The policy of a northern expedition to reunite China under Guomintang leadership was still waiting to be carried out. Having incorporated members of the Communist party and adopted anti-imperialism as a policy, there was going to be a rising tide of Guomintang-led political activism among the workers and peasants, especially the former, against Chinese property-owning classes and foreign imperialists. Without Sun to moderate the differences between the widely disparate elements in his party, stretching from the old-fashioned conservative right to the radical Leninists, the struggle for power within the left and right of the Guomintang itself, and between both of these and the Communists, was going to intensify.

A critical issue between these groups concerned the radicalization of the workers and peasants. The Communists on the far left stood for redistribution of the land of the landlords to the peasants, for state ownership of the means of production, and for the ascendancy of the proletariat. Prior to and after the CCP members joined the Guomintang, the Communists were working actively with the peasants and workers to politicize and organize them. It was not difficult to radicalize and arouse impoverished peasants and wretched workers to participate in mass movements. The Guomintang rightists, on the other hand, represented the interests of the landlords and the ‘bourgeoisie’. Private ownership of property was therefore not an option for them, and class struggle was repellent to them. Landlords and capitalists, both inside China and overseas, were among their important constituents. Understandably, the Guomintang rightists opposed the Communist ideology strongly. In order not to offend the Guomintang right, the Soviet Union ordered the Comintern agents to tone down revolutionary activities of the CCP in the countryside. As regards

agitations by the workers, some of the left-wing members of the Guomindang found it a useful tool against imperialism.

### *6.5 Labour militancy and the Guomindang left*

In spite of the political instability during the first decades of the twentieth century, the modern Chinese industry grew, and with it the size of the urban labour force. Before 1911, there were between five and six hundred thousand industrial workers. By 1919, the number had increased to over two million. Poor pay and working conditions led to spontaneous workers' strikes. Between 1911 and May 1919, there were more than 130 strikes, mostly small scale, for economic reasons. During this period, workers went on strike for political reasons also. In 1915, Shanghai dockers, and workers in Japanese enterprises in Shanghai and Changsha, went on strike against Japan's Twenty-one Demands. In 1916, workers in French enterprises in Tianjin stopped work, protesting against the French enlargement of their settlement in that city. This led other workers in Tianjin to strike also in support of the patriotic cause. Soon students cut classes and merchants closed shops in Tianjin, followed by similar occurrences in Beijing, until the French abandoned their planned expansion.

From the early 1920s, the activity of the Guomindang leftists and the Communists among the urban workers rendered the latter more radical, militant, and more prone to take action on political grounds, in addition to economic ones. Labour became more tightly organized into unions, and the strikes became increasingly more massive, leading often to the owners, domestic or foreign, giving way to the workers' economic demands. In 1922, the Guomindang supported a strike of almost 30,000 seamen and dockers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Their action stopped the movement of 150 ships carrying 250,000 tons of cargo. It also provoked sympathetic work stoppages by electricians, tramway workers and vegetable sellers. The seamen won 15 to 30 percent wage increases, after the strike had lasted for over a year and the number of striking workers had swelled to over 120,000.

1925 was a year noted for labour unrest and militant mass movements. During May of that year, a Japanese-owned textile mill in Shanghai locked out a group of Chinese workers, who went on strike. The irate workers broke into the factory and damaged some equipment. Whereupon the Japanese guards opened fire and killed one worker. Public outcry was followed by student demonstrations and workers' strikes, and arrests. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, thousands of workers and students congregated outside the British-controlled police station of the International Settlement, to demand the release of the arrested students, and to protest against militarism and imperialism, while chanting slogans. In the tense atmosphere, the British police inspector, in charge of a group of Chinese and Sikh constables with guns pointing at the crowd, first shouted at the demonstrators, ordering them to scatter. Ten seconds later, before the crowd could disperse, he ordered his

men to fire, killing eleven and wounded twenty of the protesters. This was remembered as the infamous May 30<sup>th</sup> Incident in China.

As the shock wave of the massacre spread, demonstrators marched in twenty-eight other cities to show their solidarity with the 'May Thirtieth Martyrs', and Japanese and British citizens were attacked in several of them. In Shanghai, a general strike was called. The foreign powers reacted by bringing in their marines, and organizing foreign residents' volunteer corps to keep the International Settlements secure. Soon the epicentre of the anti-imperialist confrontations that had started in Shanghai moved south.

In June, the outrage in Shanghai prompted the Guomindang left and the Communists, together with labour leaders in Guangzhou, to initiate a serious strike in Hong Kong against the British. On June 23, an enormous number of protesters, including soldiers, cadets of Whampoa, workers, farmers, scouts, students, and even school children, gathered in Guangzhou. When the demonstrators passed near the foreign concession on Shameen Island, the British soldiers fired on them. Around 50 Chinese were killed, and over 100 wounded. One foreigner was killed when some Chinese fired back. This new outrage inflamed peoples' passion all over China, leading to a massive boycott of British goods. The boycott, together with sixteen months of strikes in Hong Kong, inflicted heavy losses on British businesses.

Did the British react, as they had repeatedly done during the Qing dynasty, by sending gunboats and troops to invade China and to intimidate the Chinese central government, forcing it to suppress its people's anti-foreign agitations? Aware of the inability of the warlord-dominated government at Beijing to suppress strikes and boycotts in southern China, the British did not do so. Chinese anti-imperialism threatened the economic interests the British had built up in China, through the operation of the unequal treaty system. They had to find a way to protect their interests and the safety of their nationals residing in the treaty ports, when they could no longer resort to their nineteenth-century style gunboat diplomacy. That policy would only work when they could use force to intimidate a central government in China to respond to their demands, and to keep its subjects quiescent. But there was no effective central government in China at that point. Violent responses against the demonstrators and strikers only made matters worse. The option of stationing a large body of troops for a prolonged period in China to maintain order was too costly for them to consider. Confronted by such a rising tide of Chinese nationalism in a fragmented China, the British had to find a way of dealing with this new situation.

Under the circumstances, the British decided to avoid further bellicose actions that might inflame the anti-imperialist passion of the Chinese public, which were after all customers for their goods. They were hostile to the rising Guomindang government at Guangzhou, especially after this government started to foment strikes and support anti-imperialist activities. Eventually, nationalism in China, as elsewhere in the world, would force imperialism to retreat. In the 1920s, the British watched closely the political and military

situation in China, particularly the movements of the Guomindang, with which they might need to develop a relationship, since this party might hold the key to the security of their investments in China.

Besides the Communists, a leading left-wing member of the Guomindang, Liao Zhongkai, played a leading part, as the head of its workers' department, in organizing massive workers' strikes and boycotts against British abuses in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. In August 20, 1925, Liao was gunned down by a group of assassins on his way to a meeting of the Guomindang Executive Committee. Shortly before his death, he held a number of key posts: the governor of Guangzhou, minister of finance, the party representative to Whampoa Academy, and a member of a small council that controlled the army. His pronounced left-wing sympathies, and his prominence, prompted some to speculate that a competitor for power, the Guomindang right, or the British, were responsible for his death. However, whoever was behind his assassination remained an unsolved mystery.

Despite the loss of Liao, the Guomindang left and the Communists appeared to dominate the party's political organization and the city of Guangzhou, where prolonged anti-imperialist strikes and the presence of armed workers patrolling the streets gave it the appearance of a 'red city'. At the Guomindang's 2<sup>nd</sup> party congress held in January 1926, out of 278 delegates, there were 168 leftists, including Communists, while the remainder was split between 45 rightists and 65 centrists. Of the 36 members of the Executive Committee of the Guomindang, there were 14 leftists and 7 Communists. For the sake of appeasing the party's centre and right, Borodin volunteered to limit the proportion of Communists on any Guomindang committees to one-third.

### *6.6 The rise of the Guomindang right*

Notwithstanding the left's apparent strength, the power of the party's centre and right must not to be underestimated: its core was the important military wing of the party. Many of the Whampoa cadets, including Chiang Kai-shek who commanded them, were from property-owning segments of the Chinese society, and they were hostile to the Communists. Some cadets formed a Society for the Study of 'Sun Yat-sen-ism' as a counterweight against Marxism. Many centre-right members of the Guomindang and business people decamped to Shanghai and Beijing from Guangzhou, because of the city's uncongenial militant-left atmosphere. Prominent among these was a group of Guomindang old-timers, who gathered, late in 1925, at the Western Hill in Beijing, to declare to the world that they intended to drive out Borodin and the Communists from their party.

On March 1926, an incident occurred at Guangzhou that significantly reduced the power and influence of the Communists in the Guomindang. It was precipitated by the mysterious arrival at dawn off the island of Whampoa of a gunboat called the *Zhongshan*, which was commanded by a Communist. Chiang Kai-shek

and some of his supporters feared that this was a part of a scheme to kidnap him. He immediately arrested the captain of *Zhongshan*, and declared martial law at Guangzhou, where he stationed armed personnel at strategic points, disarmed the workers' pickets, and detained the thirty plus Russian advisers. He also suspended the publication of CCP-affiliated newspapers, and obliged a number of the senior Chinese Communist political commissars at Whampoa to undergo 'retraining'. Within a few days after this demonstration of his power, Chiang let normality return. Realizing that he would have need of Soviet military support in his soon to be launched expedition against the northern warlords, he was not ready to break with the Soviet Union at this point. In early April, he declared that he still had faith in the alliance with the Soviet Union.

During this tense period, Borodin was away at Beijing conferring with his Russian colleagues in secret on Comintern strategy. When Borodin returned in late April, Chiang demanded that he provide a list of the current CCP members to the Executive Committee of the Guomintang; disallow Guomintang members to join the CCP; ban CCP criticism of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People; and report Comintern orders to CCP to a Guomintang committee. Furthermore, Chiang asked Borodin to accept that, in the future, no Communist was to be the head of the Guomintang or lead any bureau of its government. Borodin was obliged to agree to all of Chiang's demands, because Lenin's successor, Stalin, who was locked in a power struggle with Leon Trotsky during this time, did not want to be discredited by the failure of his China policy. The expulsion of the Soviet advisers and the Chinese Communists from the Guomintang would have constituted such a failure.

Chiang's coup enhanced his position in the Guomintang by discrediting his rival, Wang Jingwei, who decided to leave China for a while. It was a serious blow to the CCP members within the Guomintang. The CCP leader Chen Duxiu, who regarded the Guomintang-led movement as a revolution of the propertied classes, wanted to withdraw members of his party from the 'united front', but the Comintern did not allow him to do so. Being forced to remain, they placed their hopes on being able eventually to subvert and take over the Guomintang from within. In the meantime, they concentrated on organizing and radicalizing the workers. Some of them went to the countryside to work with peasants. Mao Zedong, who returned to Hunan to form peasant associations, was an example.

### *6.7 Chiang Kai-shek and the Northern Expedition*

In the spring of 1926, a year after Sun's death, the question of his successor remained unsettled. In July 1925, Wang Jingwei, who led the left wing of the Guomintang, became the chairman of the National Government at Guangzhou at the height of radical labour agitations, but he had a fatal weakness: lack of control of the party army. Rather, military power rested in the hands of Chiang Kai-shek, as commander of

the army led by Whampoa cadets. His above-mentioned coup shifted the balance of power within the party more in favour of the centre and the right. After a series of military victories against local warlord forces in Guangdong since late 1924, Chiang was ready, by the middle of 1926, to launch the historic 'Northern Expedition' against major northern warlords, to unite China. As we have seen, after the Revolution of 1911, Sun had launched many failed northern expeditions. To Sun's heirs, this remained the mission of the revived Guomintang that they were duty-bound to carry out, when the time was right. After Chiang won the support of the Guomintang leadership for the Northern Expedition, Chen Duxiu and some other Communist leaders found reasons to oppose such a move at that point. But he and other CCP members had to go along with it on Stalin's order, passed through Borodin. At this point, Stalin still needed the CCP to cooperate with the Guomintang as his internal political battle with Trotsky continued.

Preparation for this critically important military campaign required considerations of military manpower, money, the logistics of supply, the routes of advance, alliances with non-belligerent militarists, and organizing urban workers and rural peasants to sabotage the warlord forces in support of the advancing 'National Revolutionary Army', which was the official name given to the troops of the Northern Expedition.

By the summer of 1926, there were nearly 8,000 Whampoa cadets and 85,000 armed men incorporated into the National Revolutionary Army from the troops of defeated militarists, or friendly warlords based in the south and southwest of China. These were organized into six main armies, with the Whampoa graduates forming an elite corps amongst these. Chiang Kai-shek was the Commander-in-Chief of this mixed force. Since the alliance with the Soviet Union was still intact, the Soviet Union supported the Guomintang's Northern Expedition with arms and military advisers, who numbered over one thousand in 1925. Chiang Kai-shek even managed to persuade Borodin to hand the Soviet arms to him, rather than to the Chinese Communists, to create a separate fighting force. Since Chen Duxiu, the CCP leader, was against the Northern Expedition at this point, he directed members of his party to put more effort towards organizing labour mass movements than infiltrating the army. In addition to the Soviet source of arms, Chiang Kai-shek's forces had already captured large amounts of military supplies from defeated warlord armies. To keep such a large number of troops supplied over vast distances, where railways or even proper roads did not exist, a large number of transport labourers was needed. These were recruited from the strikers in Guangzhou and peasants on route, who were attracted by a decent daily rate of pay.

The job of finding money to finance this operation was entrusted to T.V. Soong, the brother-in-law of Sun Yat-sen. Soong, a graduate of Harvard, had worked in the international as well as the Chinese banking industry. As finance minister of the National Government in 1925, he had skilfully managed to increase the taxes collected from the Guomintang-controlled area. Taxes from shipping and kerosene alone gathered in 3.6 million yuan per month. He had also floated bonds to raise funds for his government.

After suitable preparations, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926, the Guomintang Central Executive Committee issued an order for mobilization for the Northern Expedition to eliminate the warlord Wu Peifu and to accomplish the national unification called for by Sun Yat-sen. Zhang Zuolin and the names of other major warlords were left out, as some of them were either allies of the Guomintang, or wooed by this party as potential allies for protecting the flanks of its advancing troops, or for fighting other recalcitrant militarists. The strategy worked out by Chiang and his Russian advisers was to divide the Northern Expeditionary armies into three lines of advance: one into Hunan using the completed section of the Wuhan-Guangzhou railway, or along the Xiang river, to its provincial capital of Changsha; another along the Gan river into Jiangxi; and the third up the east coast into Fujian. If all went well, the armies would capture the major cities of the Yangzi valley and delta - Wuhan, Nanchang, Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, as well as Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian.

Taking advantage of the disagreements among the warlords in Hunan, Chiang's troops captured Changsha on July 11<sup>th</sup>. To maintain the momentum of their military thrust, they outmanoeuvred the warlord forces blocking their advance to the tri-city of Wuhan, which they surrounded in August. From September to October 10<sup>th</sup>, Hanyang, Hankou, and Wuchang fell one after another to the Guomintang-led forces, partly through fighting and partly by the defection of some of the officers who defended them. Soon after, Chiang turned his attention the military drive into Jiangxi. After heavy fighting and at the cost of 15,000 casualties, he managed to take the important cities of Jiujiang and Nanchang in November 1926. Following the initial strategy of the Northern Expedition, the third line of advance along the east coast to Fujian achieved the desired result by mid-December 1926, with the capture of Fuzhou, through a combination of military action, defection from the enemies' ranks, and persuasion of the militarists to support the Guomintang.

Moving ahead of the forces of the Northern Expedition were CCP and Guomintang propagandists, whose task was to arouse workers and peasants to support the patriotic cause and to sabotage the warlords. For fear of offending the Guomintang generals, CCP members were directed by Moscow to moderate their revolutionary activities among the peasants. Since the urban workers welcomed the forces of revolution under the banner of anti-warlordism and anti-imperialism, they readily responded to the call of the Guomintang activists for mass movements of strikes, agitations, and uprisings, often before the arrival of the troops. With the help of the Guomintang activists, they established a nationwide General Labour Union to coordinate the actions of local unions in urban centres. The coordinated radical activities of the workers, with their armed pickets, and tens to hundreds of unions depending on the size of the city, its location and trade, could bring a city to a standstill, closing its factories, docks, municipal government, transport and other services. The militarists controlling these cities mostly suppressed these union activities with violence,



killing and locking up their leaders. The workers hoped that the new regime under the Guomindang would bring them economic improvement, if not also political empowerment.

By the end of 1926, seven months after the start of the Northern Expedition, seven provinces with a total population of 170 million had come under the Guomindang rule. Four of these – Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, and Fujian – in addition to Guangdong, by military action, and two - Guangxi and Guizhou - by persuading the militarists in charge to join up with the Guomindang. Before the end of the year, the Guomindang government moved from Guangzhou to Wuhan. Once the Communists and many left-wing members of this party moved to Wuhan, the city became a hotbed of anti-imperialist labour agitation. At this point, Wang Jingwei returned from abroad, and he was elected to many key leadership posts in the Wuhan government. Chiang Kai-shek, who was veering increasingly to the right, decided to make his base at Nanchang in Jiangxi. Unlike the Wuhan Guomindang, Chiang began to attack militant workers, and suppress labour organizations in Jiangxi. Even though Chiang parted company with the Guomindang authority at Wuhan, he was not without supporters within this party, a number of members of the Executive Committee of which joined him in Nanchang.

Having achieved their initial targets, the Guomindang leaders were ready, by early 1927, to plan their strategy for the next phase of their Northern Expedition. Chiang Kai-shek was in favour of an immediate two-pronged drive into Shanghai, both eastward along the Yangzi and northward from Hangzhou. If successful, Chiang would be able to tap the taxable income of the Yangzi delta, a region rich in agriculture, industry and trade. The Wuhan group, on the other hand, supported Borodin's proposal for sending troops directly northward up the Wuhan-Beijing railway to join up with sympathetic warlord forces, and make a concerted assault with these forces to crush Zhang Zuolin and Wu Peifu, and take Beijing. Intense discussions between the leaders of the two sides took place without a resolution. In January 1927, Chiang Kai-shek went to Wuhan to present his case in person, but the Wuhan leaders were not persuaded. He returned to Nanchang, deeply offended by the rudeness of Borodin and the left-wing members of his party, who, for their part, were aggrieved by his persecution of the radical workers in Jiujiang. Soon Chiang began to make preparations to pursue his own plan unilaterally.

Before he started his offensive against Shanghai, the head of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce visited him at Nanchang, and offered him financial support. He also conducted negotiations with the leading members of the Bank of China in Shanghai. Not the least important was his meeting with the chief detective of the French Concession, a shadowy figure of the underworld, who was in close touch with the Green Gang (Qingbang), a secret society that had grown rich and powerful through control of opium, prostitution and gambling rackets, as well as legitimate businesses.

Chiang's rapid Guomindang drive to the Yangzi Valley changed the political landscape of China. The Guomindang's victories greatly diminished the power of Wu Peifu and his allies. Taking advantage of Wu's decline, Chang Zuolin, the warlord of Northeast, moved through the pass at Shanhaiguan into Zhili to rule over Beijing. Zhang was so vehemently anti-Communist that, in April 6, 1927, he sent his military police to raid the Soviet embassy, arresting and killing Li Dazhao and some other Chinese Communists, who sought shelter there. Although Chang Zuolin and other militarists in north and central China found the Guomindang too radical and revolutionary to co-exist with, they nevertheless found it difficult to collaborate with one another to counter this party's likely northward advance. In the spring of 1927, he had considered despatching a large army south to crush the recently arrived Guomindang in the Yangzi valley, by making use of the Beijing-Wuhan railway, and he could easily have done so; instead, he chose to annihilate the remnants of Wu Peifu's army.

Feng Yuxiang, another prominent warlord straddling northern and central China, had a long history of being sympathetic to Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement. The triumph of the Guomindang, together with a trip to the Soviet Union, prompted him. He decided to join this party in 1926. Yan Xishan, who dominated the province of Shanxi for many years, was yet another force to be reckoned with. He was watching developments before he would decide with whom to throw in his lot.

### *6.8 Chiang's bloody coup against the radicals in Shanghai*

As Chiang started his Shanghai campaign, the city was engulfed in a high tide of labour agitations. In February 1927, workers in Shanghai, led by members of the CCP, called a major general strike that paralysed the city for two days, in support of the seizure of Hangzhou by the Guomindang troops. The local warlords arrested some 300 of the strikers and executed about 20. In spite of their losses, Communists like Zhou Enlai, Li Lisan, and others in the city endeavoured to keep the spirit of the militants buoyant. Undeterred, the General Labour Union planned a second and even bigger strike, with 5,000 pickets, many of whom were later armed. The explosive atmosphere suggested the possibility of the formation of revolutionary urban soviets in Shanghai.

The large Chinese business community in Shanghai naturally felt apprehensive. Even the foreigners in the large international settlements were not entirely immune from a sense of nervousness provoked by a couple of prior incidences that had occurred recently. Early in 1927, large Chinese crowds, being influenced by CCP propaganda, rushed into the British concessions in Hankou and Jiujiang, causing damage to properties, and leading to the evacuation of foreign women and children to Shanghai. Later in March 1927, the Guomindang troops occupied Nanjing, and killed six foreigners after they marched into several foreign consulates. The British and American gunboats shelled the city to stake out an evacuation route for foreign

nationals, killing several Chinese in the process. Although the safety of the foreigners was not absolutely guaranteed, there was an ample display of foreign military prowess to protect the foreign concessions. In the spring of 1927, there were around 22,000 foreign police and armed forces in Shanghai, and out of 169 foreign warships in Chinese waters, 42 were stationed in Shanghai.

As the Guomindang forces approached Shanghai, the General Labour Union of that city, under the influence of the CCP, launched a massive general strike and insurrection, involving 600,000 workers, on March 21, 1927. The strikers occupied railway stations, cut power and telephone lines, occupied police stations, and fought against the retreating warlord forces. The insurrectionists succeeded in taking over the city without harming the foreigners, as they were under strict orders not to do. On the next day, the Guomindang troops entered Shanghai as a city already taken by friendly forces.

Looking upon the Guomindang as a regime that supported rather than persecuted them, the General Labour Unions came out into the open. On March 27, they held a public meeting to inaugurate their new headquarters in a former guildhall in Shanghai, with 1000 delegates, representing 499 unions and a membership totalling 821,282. They had a workers' militia of 2,700 men, armed with captured weapons and ammunition from the police stations and military depots. Their trust in the Guomindang was sadly mistaken, and it was soon to cost the lives of many of their members.

At the end of March, Chiang Kai-shek himself arrived in Shanghai. He promptly put out statements to reassure the foreign communities, and he also praised the unions for their achievements. Adjusting to the political climate of the moment, the CCP members tried to tone down the militancy of the union members, pressing them to disarm and withdraw their demand for the return of the foreign concessions to China. With the wealthiest of Chinese cities now having fallen into his hands, Chiang took the opportunity to secure generous loans from the Shanghai bankers. He even resorted to squeezing some of the wealthy Shanghai capitalists, by holding members of their families for ransom.

Then he proceeded to finalize the plan, which he must have already discussed with the leaders of the notorious Green Gang at Nanchang, for a bloody coup to steer the revolution towards a direction favoured by himself and many Guomindang members in the centre-right. The leaders of the Green Gang were to play a crucial part in the coup, by setting up an organization called the Society for Common Progress at the house of the chief detective of the French concession. This organization was to be a front for a force of about 1,000 well-armed men, awaiting orders to spring into action. At the same time, Chiang moved out of the city the army units that were known to sympathize with the workers.

Before dawn of April 12, 1927, the heavily armed men of the Society for Common Progress, dressed in blue civilian clothes with white armbands, spearheaded a wave of attacks on the headquarters of all of

Shanghai's large unions, which had rendered themselves more vulnerable by operating openly in what they had come to regard as a friendly environment. Although Chiang's suppression of mass movements of the peasants and workers during his military drive to Shanghai had aroused Chen Duxi's fear that Chiang was going to use force against the Communists and workers in Shanghai, Chen was prohibited from preparing for a fight against Chiang by the Comintern, which insisted on using mass movements only as a weapon to counter the Guomindang rightists. As the armed thugs continued their assault against the hapless workers, they were aided and abetted by the forces of the foreign concessions, and the National Revolutionary Army. Many union members were either killed or arrested by the attackers, who also disarmed the pickets. When workers, students and Shanghai residents gathered to protest against the brutal acts the next day, the National Revolutionary Army fired on them with machine guns, killing almost 100 people. A reign of terror was unleashed during the next few weeks, when many Communists and labour leaders were arrested and executed. Chen Duxi's elder son was among the victims. Soon afterwards, the General Labour Unions were outlawed, and all strikes ceased.

This stroke unveiled Chiang as the leader of the Guomindang right, which fell into the Soviet category of 'national bourgeoisie', with which the CCP could make no accommodation. Even though Chiang had extorted large sums of money from wealthy families in Shanghai, his strong stance against the Communists and militant labour unions won him the approval of the capitalist class, Chinese as well as foreign. Since the Guomindang in Wuhan, dominated by its left wing, had removed Chiang from his top civil and military posts in its 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session in March, Chiang defied it by setting up, on April 18, 1927, his own government in Nanjing, with the support of most of the members of the party's Central Executive Committee.

The ferocity of Chiang's coup sent the CCP and their members inside the Guomindang into a state of shock. Stalin, however, continued to instruct the CCP to work closely with the Wuhan Guomindang leftists who, as 'petty bourgeoisie', were to lead the masses together with the CCP to achieve the 'bourgeois democratic revolution', the proper stage of revolution for China at that point, while casting aside Chiang and his right-wing clique. Stalin's rival Trotsky, who did not regard the Wuhan Guomindang as sufficiently revolutionary to be a reliable partner for the Communists, advocated the CCP going alone to create soviets of workers and peasants, but he was powerless to influence the situation. After Wang Jingwei returned to China early in April 1927 to assume leadership of the Wuhan government, Chen Duxi was able to work out a joint declaration with Wang to reaffirm the bond between the Guomindang and Chinese Communists. However, the leftists of the Guomindang were far from being class warriors, and tension between the two groups with widely different political outlooks and goals remained high. The issue of redistribution of land to the peasants was a particularly thorny one.

When some of the Guomintang-allied militarists, who sided with the landlords, mutinied against Wuhan, they led their forces to attack militant peasants who had been encouraged by the CCP to confiscate land owned by private landlords. The Communists were blamed for the disaffection of these militarists. Being restrained by the Guomintang, the Communists were neither able to take advantage of peasant militancy, nor to protect the politicized peasants, who attempted to dispossess the landlords by force. Many of the peasants perished during the counterattacks of the landlords and militarists.

Despite the weak position of the Communists inside the Guomintang, Stalin wired his Comintern agents, Borodin and M. N. Roy (an Indian Communist posted by Stalin to China during the spring of 1927), ordering the CCP to push the Guomintang leftists further to the left, so as to achieve an agrarian revolution through seizure of land by the masses from below, to make a large number of workers and peasants into Guomintang members, in order to weaken or push out the old guard, and to mobilize 20,000 Communists and 50,000 'revolutionary workers and peasants' into a 'reliable army' to be led by student commanders. Roy unwisely revealed the contents of this telegraph to Wang Jinwei, who became seriously perturbed. He took steps immediately to curb the power of the CCP and radical peasant movements.

Although the leaders of the left-wing Guomintang regime, like the Communists, had been fomenting workers' anti-imperialist movements in Wuhan, by the spring of 1927 their zeal for revolution had cooled. Instead, consolidating their positions and power vis-a-vis Chiang Kai-shek in Nanjing was their main concern at that point. In this competition, they needed, much like Chiang, the support of bankers, industrialists, landlords, and certain friendly militarists. Their army of 70,000, though much smaller than the one controlled by Chiang, required more money to support than they were able to provide. They could only raise a fraction of the 15 million yuan per month they needed to fund their civil and military administration. Even though their government was in serious financial difficulty, they still proceeded with the ambitious plan of joining their army with that of general Feng Yuxiang on a northern expedition targeting Beijing. On April 18, 1927, the Wuhan government led by Wang Jingwei despatched an army that met Feng's troops on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June at Zhengzhou, where Feng and Wang conferred on their future cooperation. Feng urged the two separate Guomintang governments to mend their relationship and join together. As a condition of his continuing support for Wuhan, Feng demanded the removal of the Communists from the Guomintang.

Since the leaders of the Wuhan government had already developed a deep mistrust and antipathy towards the Communists in their midst, Feng's demand was easy to satisfy. In July 1927, they expelled the Communists from their ranks and put an end to the first united front between their party and the Communists. This situation prompted Borodin, Roy and other Comintern agents to start their long journey to the Soviet Union by land, with Madame Sun Yat-sen in tow. This was not an outcome desired by Stalin,

who insisted on the correctness of his line. Moscow put the blame for the failure of the policy of the 'united front' on Chen Duxiu, who was accused of 'opportunism' and 'contradicting Comintern instructions'. Chen was replaced as the secretary-general of the CCP by the twenty-eight-year-old Qu Qiubai, who had spent the early 1920s as a language student in Moscow. (Chen became an active Trotskyite after he was expelled from the CCP in 1929.) Since the Guomindang leftists had been exposed as 'petty-bourgeois', the CCP was ordered by Moscow to unite instead with the 'really revolutionary' members of the Guomindang, assuming they existed, and to instigate peasant uprisings in the countryside.

### *6.9 Stalin's demand for insurrections and the CCP's failed uprisings*

Without the restraining influence of the Guomindang, the Communists were able to carry out their radical agenda with the workers and the peasants more freely. A number of Communist activists radicalizing the peasants in the countryside were organizing peasant Soviets openly in various parts of China. Mao Zedong was one of them. In February 1927, after investigating the conditions of peasants in his native province of Hunan, Mao submitted, in February 1927, a report advising the CCP that the conditions in the countryside were ripe for revolutionary uprisings. The Communist authorities ignored his research. Instead of aiding and abetting peasant militancy, he had to spend the summer trying to prevent peasant seizure of the land belonging to some militarists in obedience to Comintern orders. By the time the CCP was preparing to stage the insurrections demanded by the Comintern, the radical peasant movements had already suffered a severe battering from the forces of landlords and militarists. Instead of collecting 100,000 armed peasants as Mao had hoped, he was only able to raise an army of about 2,000 peasants, miners and Guomindang deserters. In response to the Comintern order, early in September 1927, Mao launched the Autumn Harvest Uprisings with this very limited force, attacking several small towns near Changsha. After suffering considerable losses, the insurrections were promptly put down by the local peacekeeping forces. Mao gathered up the survivors and retreated to a mountainous area, the Jinggan Mountain, in Jiangxi.

Slightly earlier, in August 1927, a larger scale Communist insurrection occurred in the former base of Chiang Kai-shek in Nanchang. About 20,000 troops led by several Communist generals mutinied and took over the city and expropriated the banks. Among the leaders of the insurrection was the German-trained Zhu De, who had kept his Communist connection hidden until then. Zhu would later have a distinguished long career as the foremost commander of the Red army. After holding out for 10 days, the rebels were defeated by anti-Communist forces nearby. This Communist army retreated south and captured Swatow

briefly before joining the rural soviet organized by Peng Pai at Hai-Lu-Feng near Guangzhou. A few months later Zhu De and members of this rural soviet moved to Jiangxi to join Mao Zedong.

Still eager for victory in the Chinese revolution, Stalin ordered Qu Qiubai to stage another insurrection. Qu obediently engineered an uprising at Guangzhou. On December 11, 1927 Communist troops and radical workers seized the barracks, police stations, and the post and telegraph offices of the city, which was declared a workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviet. This radical commune at Guangzhou lasted two days before being brutally crushed by the same anti-Communist general who had defeated the Communist mutineers at Nanchang. Moscow laid the blame for this disastrous defeat at the door of the CCP, the leaders of which were reprimanded for 'playing with insurrections instead of organizing a mass uprising of the workers and peasants'.

### *6.10 The unification of China under Chiang's leadership*

By purging the Communists from their midst, there was hope for the two Guomintang governments to merge and to strengthen this party's bid to unite China. Wang Jingwei demanded Chiang's removal as a condition for unity. After a serious military setback for Chiang at Xuzhou, his opponents at Nanjing – the Guangxi militarists, who joined the Guomintang Northern Expedition, and one of his own Whampoa commanders - were raising their voices against him. In August 1927, Chiang decided that it was wise for him to step down temporarily, while keeping a finger on the pulse of political events, so as to make a comeback later.

He used the time profitably by going to Japan, to clinch his marriage contract with Soong Meiling, a graduate of Wellesley College, and the youngest daughter of Charlie Soong, whose widow was then living in Japan. The Soong family offered Chiang important connections, and a touch of glamour to his dour military image. Successful Chinese with an American background were held in high social esteem in the modernizing Chinese treaty-port society, a segment of Chiang's political constituents. One of her older sisters, Soong Qingling, was the widow of Sun Yat-sen. The political advantage of being the brother-in-law of the deceased Sun, who had become a party icon and cult figure, should not be underestimated. Another sister married H. H. Kong (Kong Xiangxi), a graduate of Oberlin College and Yale University, who served Sun Yat-sen and played many roles such as fundraiser, entrepreneur, public administrator, and diplomatic negotiator, with distinction. Her brother, T.V. Soong, as the Minister of Finance of the Guomintang government at Guangzhou, successfully funded the initial financial needs of the first phase of the Northern Expedition. Undoubtedly, Chiang's marriage brought him important new personal ties and an American connection.

The fact that Chiang had already had three serial partners or 'wives', two of whom had born him children, did not turn out to be an insurmountable obstacle to the Soong family. Although the law of the Chinese republic banned polygamy, multiple wives were not uncommon among wealthy merchants and powerful militarists. Soong Meiling, who became Madame Chiang Kai-shek in December 1927, through a Christian as well as a Chinese marriage ceremony, was certainly not going to be a part of a polygamous establishment. Chiang detached himself unceremoniously from his former partners, while acknowledged Soong only as his wife.

Chiang's temporary withdrawal from China's political scene enabled the opposing Guomindang factions to merge. Most of the Wuhan Guomindang leaders moved to join the Nanjing government, apart from Wang Jingwei, who went back to Guangzhou. Without Chiang the second leg of the Northern Expedition was stalled, and the Finance Minister, Sun Fo (Sun Yat-sen's son) was unable to raise sufficient funds for the government. The unpaid troops, stationed in Shanghai, would not march north against the warlord Zhang Zuolin. Soon Chiang's supporters in Nanjing clamoured for his return. In January 1928, he was welcomed back to Nanjing, to resume his post as Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Army. In February 1928, he was elected a member the standing committee of the Central Executive Committee of the Guomindang at its 4<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session at Nanjing. His new brother-in-law, T.V. Soong, became the Minister of Finance in January of the same year. By a mixture of coercion and financial dexterity, Soong was able to provide funds amounting to 1.5 million yuan every five days, needed to get the Northern Expedition going again.

Since Wu Peifu had been severely mauled, the target this time was to dislodge Zhang Zuolin from Beijing. In order to achieve this goal, Chiang felt the need to take on board as allies the powerful northern militarists, Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan, who had expressed willingness to support China united under the Guomindang. After heavy fighting, Chiang's troops entered Jinan in Shandong in March 1928. From there Chiang's forces were to join Feng's at Tianjin to cut off Zhang's retreat by rail through the Shanhaiguan pass, back to his old Northeast lair. With easy reach by rail from Tianjin, Beijing would be within the grasp of the forces of the Chiang-Feng alliance.

At this point the Japanese intervened. Japan's interests in Shandong and China's Northeast (referred to as Manchuria by the Japanese) were incompatible with a united strong China. Japan sent 5,000 troops to Jinan, ostensibly to protect the 2,000 Japanese residents, who in fact were not harmed by Chinese soldiers. Starting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, the Japanese troops clashed savagely with Chiang's, and by May 11<sup>th</sup>, the Chinese forces were driven out of the city. Following an ineffective appeal to the League of Nations, Chiang regrouped his troops outside Jinan on the northern bank of the Yellow River.



In order to avoid a military contest at Tianjin, a major treaty port with substantial international settlements and business interests, the Japanese pressed Zhang Zuolin to return to 'Manchuria' peacefully, which he did for lack of a better option. The Japanese also informed Zhang that they would not allow the Northern Expeditionary forces to enter Manchuria. Zhang left Beijing in a luxury railcar on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, after ordering a general retreat of his forces. On the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, when his train approached Mukden, the capital of Liaoning, a bomb exploded and he was seriously wounded and died a few hours later. Young Japanese officers of the bellicose Kwangtung (Guangdong) Army engineered Zhang's assassination, partly because they did not find Zhang sufficiently cooperative, and also because they wanted to provoke a crisis that would facilitate Japan's further expansion into north China. After Zhang Zuolin's death, his son Zhang Xueliang succeeded him as the leader of the Fengtian group of militarists occupying most of China's three provinces of the Northeast.

After Zhang and his army departed from Beijing, the power vacuum he left behind was promptly filled by Yan Xishan, the warlord from Shanxi. Yan moved his troops, as a participant of the Guomindang's Northern Expedition, to occupy the Beijing-Tianjin region in June 1928. The recovery of Beijing (northern capital) marked the completion of the Northern Expedition. Since Nanjing (southern capital) and Chiang's power base, had taken Beijing's place as the official capital of the united China, Beijing was renamed Beiping (northern peace). At this point, Chiang declared the end of 'military government' and the beginning of a period of party 'tutelage' in accordance with Sun Yat-sen's idea of three stages of political development for China, starting from military government, to party 'tutelage', in preparation for full democracy as the final stage.

The National government that was formally proclaimed on October 10, 1928 quickly moved to consolidate itself. During the same month, the Guomindang passed a set of regulations on the party tutelage and on the organization of the National government. Soon afterwards, the government at Nanjing was reorganized with Chiang appointed Chairman of the State Council, the sixteen-member ruling body at the top of the government. He was also named Commander-in-Chief of the army, navy, and air force. Being at the period of 'tutelage', Chiang's government could conveniently do without adopting the trappings of democracy, such as the election of a national assembly and a cabinet form of government, or the separation of powers and the need for checks and balances.

To the disappointment of the Japanese, Zhang Zuolin's son was more nationalistic and even less cooperative with their interference in the affairs of the Three Northeast Provinces than his father had been. Chiang Kai-shek had no difficulty wooing him to submit to Nanjing rule, and making him a member of the State Council. On December 1928, he pledged allegiance to the National government and raised

the Nationalist flag in the Northeast. With the Northeast joining Nanjing, the 'unification' of China under Chiang's leadership was considered accomplished, at least nominally. The Nationalist flag with the white sun in a blue sky on the red earth flew from Mukden to Guangzhou, signaling the achievement of Sun Yat-sen's ambition of uniting China by his heirs.

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