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Towards a United Republic (1905-1928)

In 1644 Manchu warriors from the Northeast came through the Great Wall, overthrew the Ming Dynasty, and established their own dynasty, the Qing (meaning 'pure'). The Manchus ruled as Chinese emperors, adopting most of the Ming governmental apparatus, and even much of its culture. In the 'golden age' of the Qing (1683-1799), the empire was of great extent, stretching from Siberia to Burma, and from Central Asia to Taiwan. It was one of the most powerful empires of the eighteenth century. But its leaders failed to understand the dire military threat posed by the industrializing Western nation, and Japan. Beginning from the Opium War of 1839-1842 China was increasingly exploited by those powers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Qing court was terminally weak and faced external domination and internal unrest, with demands for reform and calls for revolution. Sun Yat-sen was the most prominent revolutionary in the last stages of the Qing dynasty. A staunch Republican, he briefly served as the Provisional President of the Republic of China 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 in 1912, 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 ten years of repeated conflicts among 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. He overcame all warlord resistance and declared a united government under Nationalist rule in Beijing on 10 October 1928.

The End of the Qing Dynasty

Sun Yat-sen

In the closing years of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty, prior to its collapse in the early twentieth century, 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 traditional social classes, a Chinese bourgeoisie, and factory workers in modern industries, had also emerged in the cities of the treaty ports[1], 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 less distinct. 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 had returned to China after having been educated abroad. As the country with the largest community of overseas Chinese students (reaching 12,000 in 1906), Japan was a hotbed of Chinese revolutionary activities.

The revolutionaries organized societies with names like 'Recovery', 'China Revival', and 'Patriotic Study', and published newspapers and books to propagate their causes. 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 bear fruit. The revolutionaries aroused violent reactions and reprisals from the Qing government; many of them took such risks that they seemed willing to sacrifice their lives for the love of their country.

[1] Following the defeat of China by Britain in the Opium War of 1939-1842, the Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) in 1842, by terms dictated by the British, forced the Chinese to open four ports along the Chinese coast for British trade, in addition to the already open port of Canton (Guangzhou). The four were Shanghai, Ningpo, Foochow (Fuzhou) and Amoy (Xiamen). By 1900 there were fourteen such ports, open to all the imperial powers.

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 rejected his father's plan for him to continue his education in the Classics, to acquire scholar-gentry or official status through examination successes. Instead, in 1902, the seventeen-year-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 to save China 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 radical ideas like freedom, equality, and restoring to the Chinese people their democratic rights, which Zou believed they were entitled to have and which they had been denied by the emperor's absolutism. It quickly sold over one million copies, having great popular appeal in China and among Chinese overseas. Protected by the extraterritoriality[2] of the Shanghai International Settlement, Zou and his well-known revolutionary friend, Zhang Taiyan, an editor of the popular revolutionary newspaper Su Daily (the 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 just 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 was a leader who, over many years, brought far-reaching revolutionary changes to China. He was remembered and revered, after his untimely death, as the Father of the Chinese Republic. He was born, in November 1866, 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 by the hard lot of the Chinese people, and wanted to help them, and improve things in China. When he returned home in 1883, aged 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 after intentionally damaging several statues of deities in a temple, possibly as a gesture against superstition. This act was reminiscent of the iconoclastic Hong Xiuquan, the Taiping leader, whom Sun greatly admired.

[2] The privilege of extraterritoriality (typically established through treaties on unequal terms between China and an imperial power) entitled foreigners living in China to be governed by the laws of their own countries, not the laws of China. Extraterritoriality led to a significant weakening of Chinese sovereignty.

Sun then went to Hong Kong to continue his studies, until he graduated in 1892 with the degree of Bachelor of Medicine.

As a student in Hong Kong, Sun 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 finally 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. As a consequence, he began to entertain the idea of overthrowing the Qing. From 1892, after he started to practise 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 establish the China Revival Society (*Xing Zong Hui*) with them, with the aim of 'restoring China' to the Chinese by 'expelling the Tartar barbarians' (meaning the Manchus). He was also deeply interested in developing China's economy. 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, and commerce and transportation, through adopting Western science and technology and management institutions. He was disappointed at Li's perfunctory response. Then came the Sino-Japanese War, and Sun felt a mixture of anger and despair at the Qing's weakness and inability to deal with Japan. He abandoned any hope of reform from the Qing, which he regarded as having sold out to the imperial powers and prevented China's revival. From that point onwards, he became a dedicated revolutionary, making the downfall of the Qing his top priority.

SunYat-sen (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 10 November 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Yat-sen)

In late 1894, Sun founded the Chinese Revival Society in Honolulu. Several months later, in February 1895, he and other members gathered to establish its headquarters in Hong Kong, with a branch in Guangzhou. They recruited several leaders of secret societies, as well as patriotic students and intellectuals. The core members of this organization, together with Sun, raised funds in Hong Kong, purchased arms and ammunition, and recruited and trained an army to stage an uprising. But the plan was leaked by informers and the government of Hong Kong to the Qing authorities, who 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, a former dean of the Hong Kong College of Medicine. 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 the revolution he led, as will be described shortly.

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 the 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 gradualist reformers were too great for them to cooperate. Instead, the two sides used the public media to compete for adherents in a propaganda war.

In 1900, during the perilous time of the Boxer crisis[3] 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 two southern provinces, Guangdong, and Guangxi. He hoped that Li would declare the two provinces independent, because he had defied 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 the independence

[3] Between 1899 and 1901 the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists (*Yi He Tuan*), known as the Boxers in English because many of the members practised Chinese martial arts, led a sustained anti-foreign, anti-colonial and anti-Christian rebellion.

of the 'Two Guangs' would lead many other provinces to break away from the Qing and form a Chinese republic. As a backup to this scheme, he ordered his supporters in Hong Kong to purchase arms and provisions for an uprising in Guangdong. At this point, some in Japan were willing to help Sun, including some government officials. However, a change of government leadership in Japan resulted in new policies that prohibited the export of arms, and participation of the Japanese military in China's revolutionary activities. Disappointed by the British government's lack of support for the idea of independence for the 'Two Guangs', and by Li Hongzhang's move towards cooperation with the Qing court to work out terms of peace with the imperial powers, Sun decided to focus instead on the plan for an uprising in Huizhou, slated to happen early in October 1900.

As the time approached, the rebels in Huizhou, with a few hundred secret society members at the core, gathered an army of around 20,000 men. They occupied several towns and villages for ten 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 failed attempt at an uprising, and this time its failure helped the Emperor Protection Society to win more followers. Sun fought back. He went to Hawaii to reconstitute the China Revival Society and changed its name to the Chinese Revolutionary Army 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 the United States to publicize the need for building a democratic republic to save China.

The 1905 founding of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (Zhongguo Tongmenghui)

Time was on Sun's side. As China increasingly looked like a semi-colony of the imperial powers, and as the number of people who had received a modern education or had studied abroad grew, more Chinese became concerned with China's fate, and felt an urgency to act. 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 overseas Chinese students lionized him, and with the leaders of the other revolutionary societies he inaugurated the *Zongguo Tongmenghui* (United League of China, or Chinese Revolutionary Alliance), which aimed to unite all Chinese revolutionary societies under one roof. Sun was duly elected its *zong li* (chief executive). This society had several talented writers, who spread the revolutionary cause in their journal, '*Minbao*' ('The People's Journal') and attracted supporters with their

optimistic message that China could catch up, or even overtake the West in twenty years if its people would embrace revolution.

At age 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 underground members there to carry the domestic movement forward. Outside China, he travelled widely and tirelessly, between Europe, America, Hawaii, southeast Asia, and Japan. He made speeches, wrote for newspapers, recruited new members, liaised with colleagues, strengthened or reorganized existing societies, and plotted uprisings. He found the overseas Chinese communities an ever-ready source of funds for his activities.

In addition to having an organization, Sun developed an 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 sentiment. 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 appealed to the rural landlords, but it was predicated upon economic development through industrialization.

To realize the Three Principles, 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, he thought, as the Chinese people had to be educated and prepared for exercising their rights. The stages were: three years of military government by the revolutionary army; six years of 'tutelage' under a provisional constitution; and finally, a constitutional government with an elected parliament and president. This ultimate form of government was to have five branches with built-in checks and balances: legislative, executive, judiciary, examination, and censorial.

What were the sources and inspirations 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. For Sun, since modernization inevitably meant adopting or adapting Western ideas, institutions, and practices, a Western education free of preconceptions from the Chinese classics was not a disadvantage. His political and economic ideas developed through his own reading, study, and observation of the institutions and politics of many of the countries, the United States and England in particular, which he had visited and stayed in. For example, the first three of the above-mentioned five branches of government were based on an American model, while the remaining two had traditional Chinese roots. His *min sheng* principle was inspired by Henry George's idea of 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 a constitutional monarchy with mass education, to prepare them gradually for greater political participation - but Sun dispensed with the monarchy part.

After the establishment of the Revolutionary Alliance, Sun and his followers planned multiple uprisings with the help of many secret societies. After the failure of one in Hunan in 1906, Sun was expelled from Japan at the request of the Qing in 1907. He moved to Hanoi to organize the Revolutionary Alliance in Vietnam, and to be near the border of China's southwest to stage uprisings 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 Indochina expelled Sun from Vietnam. In 1908, Sun's followers led two uprisings again in the provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan; though these lasted somewhat longer, they also failed.

Sun was not discouraged by these failures; he regarded them as providing lessons to be learned. Although there were many reasons for the failure of these uprisings, including absence of thorough preparation and insufficiency of supplies, Sun saw that, as a fighting force, the secret society members lacked discipline, and were no match for the Qing's 'New Army'. From then on, he directed members of the Revolutionary Alliance 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 branches of the Revolutionary Alliance, and raised a large sum of money for the revolutionary cause, before he departed for Europe and the United States in 1909. Referring to his failed coups, Sun quoted the Chinese saying: 'failure is the mother of success'.

The issue of railway rights

The One Hundred Days' Reform[4], 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, territorial integrity, and economic independence. 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 angered Chinese students all over China, who organized 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 formed. 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 the United States' repatriation of Chinese labourers, and of Chinese anger at the persecution and discrimination suffered by the Chinese immigrants 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 did trigger 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 several provinces from foreign hands. This process, however, did not go smoothly.

Since the 1860s, the British had demanded that the Qing permit them 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 and Wusong. The Qing, unable to deal forcefully with this brazen disregard of its authority and policy, purchased the line and then destroyed it. During the 1880s, however, the Qing authorities, having now decided that the railways were useful, started to build some lines themselves. For various reasons connected with politics and funding, progress was slow. By 1896, only 370 miles of railways existed in

[4] A short-lived and failed Reform movement undertaken in 1898 by the emperor Guangxu, who was influenced by Kang Youwei's proposals. The reforms were reversed by the empress dowager Cixi, who placed the emperor under house arrest.

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 period of the 'scramble concessions'[5] in the late 1890s, the imperialist nations had 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 in 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, who were 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 for 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, staffed by merchants and gentry with wide popular support, sprang up in most provinces. They formed private companies to raise funds locally, issuing bonds for the purpose of buying back the rights to develop railway lines given to foreigners, and to carry out railway construction projects themselves. The enormous passion behind the drive for private Chinese ownership of the railways was propelled not only by the desire for profit, but also by nationalistic sentiment. However, apart from a handful of relatively short lines attributable to private capital, these movements did not manage to raise sufficient funds to establish a large-scale network of railways in China through private means.

In May 1911, the Qing court decided to centralize the railways through nationalization, to give itself greater control over this important means of transportation, as was explained in the edict that promulgated this measure. An even more compelling reason was a financial one. The central government was short of money to the tune of 30 million taels[6], 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 money through loans from a foreign consortium of British, American, German, and French banks, using as mortgage two major trunk railway lines. These 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 the government would seize these railway lines from its Chinese

[5] A term referring to the spate of demands for territorial concessions from the Western powers, Russia, and Japan.
[6] One tael was equivalent to approximately 1.3 ounces of silver.

subjects, who had raised funds privately to buy back from foreign hands the right to develop these lines, and then offer them as security to the banks of the very nations that were using railways as an important tool of economic imperialism in China.

The Qing court's high-handed disregard for the interests of the Chinese people, and for their passionate drive to regain Chinese control of these vital transport arteries, 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 planned 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 included not only the Chinese investors, who were largely local elites of the gentry-merchant type, but also large numbers of workers, students, peasants, and members of the New Army. In protest 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 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. The crowd was fired upon, causing several deaths, following which the protest movement quickly turned into uprisings all over Sichuan. Members of the Revolutionary Alliance took the opportunity to set up a power base at Rong Xian.

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 5,000 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 a joint uprising on 11 October in Wuchang. This city was one of the strategically located three cities that straddled the Yangtze River; it, together with Hankou and Hanyang, formed the triple city complex known as Wuhan, in central China. Wuhan was a major centre of transportation where the Yangtze 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, members of the New Army, and workers in modern industries, to create a volatile anti-Qing political underground force, ready to erupt.

On 9 October the accidental explosion of a bomb in the Russian Concession in Hankou led the Qing authority to arrest several revolutionary activists, who were immediately executed, and to discover at their headquarters membership registers, which contained the names of rebel 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 insurrection later known as the Revolution of 10 October 1911, the celebrated event that is considered the symbolic end of Qing rule in China.

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 11 October 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, on the recommendation of the constitutionalists they chose Li Yuanhong, a former brigade commander of the New Army, 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 realise that Li was actually an opponent of the revolution, and that the constitutionalists, who managed his government, were more conservative than revolutionary Thus the politically unsophisticated and inexperienced revolutionaries unknowingly threw away the fruits of the revolution they had fought for.

The victory at Wuhan stimulated activists all over China to ride the revolutionary wave. They led members of the New Army, secret societies, disaffected workers, peasants, and the city poor to rise up against the Qing and effectively take over the government. On 22 October 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 southern 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 prominent members of the Revolutionary Alliance, with the exception of Jiangsu, where the existing governor was persuaded by the local elites to sever his ties with the Qing and become a new-style military governor.

Yuan Shikai as premier in Beijing

What was the attitude of the imperial powers to these insurgencies in China? Not surprisingly they favoured the Qing, who had collaborated with them in maintaining the unequal treaty system – that is, the treaties concluded under duress between China and the imperial powers, and Japan. Soon after the Wuchang uprising, the fleets of Britain, the United States, 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 had greatly impressed the imperialists with his vigorous campaign against the Boxers. They strongly urged the Qing to reinstate 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 grudge against Yuan for betraying his brother, the emperor Guangxu, during the One Hundred Days' Reform. The Russians, on the other hand, saw the Qing's breakup as an opportunity to expand and strengthen their frontier with China. They accordingly sent an army to occupy various areas of Heilongjiang 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.

Yuan Shikai (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 20 November 2023 from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuan_Shikai)

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. Under pressure to re-instate Yuan Shikai, the court offered him, on 14 October, 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 had 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 quell the unrest there. Instead of doing so, he joined other commanding officers in sending 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 would be forbidden to serve. Within a week, the court acceded 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 1 November. Yuan accepted the position after the Provisional National Assembly in Beijing officially elected him Premier of China on 8 November. 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 consolidated political and military power in his hands, Yuan ousted prince Chun as regent. During the same month, the forces he had deployed against the revolutionaries in the south took back Hankou and Hanyang, but not Wuchang. The series of developments in Beijing seemed to suggest that China was moving towards a constitutional monarchy, which the reformers Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and the constitutionalists had striven for. But 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 had declared independence from the Qing soon felt the need to get together to form a central 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 in Shanghai on 15 November. Later, their parliament was moved to Wuhan, where the delegates passed the `Outline of the Organization of the Provisional Government' on 2 December 1911. After Nanjing was taken from the Qing on the same day 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. The provisional government was a coalition of disparate elements. Politically, the new power holders in these provinces could be roughly divided into two groups, conservatives and revolutionaries. Among the conservatives were the constitutionalists, the ex-Qing officials, the gentry, and wealthy merchants, while the revolutionaries were mainly students at 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 groups.

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 negotiations 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 2 December to vote for various executive officers of their government, the top post was left unoccupied, to be filled by Yuan, if 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 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, with the aim 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 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.

Sun Yat-sen as provisional president in Nanjing

Where was Sun Yat-sen when the revolution to which he had devoted his life was actually taking place? Sun was on a fundraising campaign in the middle of the United States. He was overjoyed when he read about the Wuchang uprising in a Denver newspaper on 12 October. He decided to return to China, but in a circuitous way, so as to carry out some important diplomatic work en route. Primarily, Sun wanted to persuade the Western powers 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, both political and financial, for the new regime in the South. When he reached New York on 30 October, 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 21 November he arrived in Paris, where he pressed the French to recognize the Republic of China, but without success. 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 29 December 1911, as the provisional president of the government in Nanjing. Sun was inaugurated on 1 January 1912, which, together with the introduction of the international solar calendar, became officially the first year of the Republic of China, replacing 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 the presidential position, not only to the revolutionaries, but also to the conservative delegates – that is, the constitutionalists and former Qing officials. Being made aware of Nanjing's earlier 'promise' to Yuan, Sun sent a telegram to Yuan on the day 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.

Under Sun's leadership, 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 several other `societal evils', as deemed by the government, 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, a policy was developed 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 with foreign nations would remain in effect.

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 imperial 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, without having to suffer civil war or foreign intervention.

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 in the South, Yuan promptly broke off the peace

negotiations, 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 11 January 1912 Sun decided to lead an army northward against Yuan. Although Sun scored some military successes at the beginning, he was seriously hampered by the lack of real power to command a united army. The different army units he had pulled together were controlled by those who owed him, an outsider, little loyalty, and who may not even have shared 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 insist on a military solution. They recognized Yuan as the one man who could lead a reunited China at that point. If Sun had been an experienced military commander with a powerful army under his control (like Oliver Cromwell in 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. At the same time, 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 seemingly intractable obstacles, Sun decided to negotiate with Yuan for a peaceful solution, which would amount to Sun vacating his office in favour of Yuan. Sun agreed to do so, on the condition that China be reunited under a republican form of government. Yuan prevaricated, and on 14 January 1912 he asked Tang Shaoyi to find out whether Sun would give up his post, and whether the parliament of the provisional government at Nanjing would really elect him (Yuan) as President, if he successfully persuaded Emperor Xuantong 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, emperor Xuantong's mother, the dowager empress Longyu, had managed state affairs sitting behind a screen like the late dowager empress Cixi, but with little of her predecessor's power, because Yuan totally dominated the government in Beijing. On 16 January Yuan went to the court to address a memorial to dowager empress Longyu on the matter of bringing about a republican form of government, after bribing a eunuch and several senior officials to persuade her to agree. While waiting for her response, Yuan prompted a group of senior officers of the Beiyang Army to send, on 26 January, a memorial by telegram to the Beijing government, denouncing certain members of the imperial clan for opposing republicanism, and reasserting his pro-republican position.

From around the time when Yuan started his aggressive 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 20 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, which helped Yuan's cause. In a desperate attempt to win over Yuan's support for the dynasty, dowager empress Longyu offered to ennoble Yuan as a marquis of the first class, but Yuan refused the offer. Yuan then organized an association agitating for China to become a republic, and at the same time he pressed the throne personally to settle the matter. 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 dowager empress Longyu agreed to the abdication of her son, after Yuan assured her of the personal safely and financial security of the emperor and his family.

The dowager empress Longyu (*New World* Encyclopedia: retrieved on 10 November 2023 from https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Empress_Dowager_Longyu&oldid=1064099.)

Having obtained the desired response from the court, Yuan and the parliament of the provisional government in Nanjing agreed to guarantee the right of the boy emperor and his family to continue to reside in the Forbidden City, with a maintenance grant of 4 million taels per annum, and the ownership of imperial treasures. Yuan also satisfied the court's demand to protect 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 2 February 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 lead a Chinese republic, Yuan declared that the republican form of government was the best, and China would never again be ruled by a monarch. On 13 February 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 to be the Provisional President. It also voted, on Sun's suggestion, to establish the capital of the reunited country in 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 imperial 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 10 March in Beijing. On 11 March Sun made another effort to tie Yuan's hands by rushing through parliament the 'Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China'. This outlined the laws for setting up and operating the democratic institutions of the new republican government, which was to be run largely by elected officers. The constitution established rules for electing the president, as well as seats in the provincial assemblies and the national parliament. 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 1 April the Nanjing Parliament voted to move the provisional government to Beijing, with Yuan Shikai as the president and Tang Shaoyi as the premier of the reunited China.

Thus the 268-year rule of the Qing dynasty expired with remarkably little violence. Because the dynasty's decline had already begun early in the nineteenth century, it suffered a lingering, slow, and prolonged death. From the 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 (1683 to 1799), the population of China had grown so large that its pre-industrial economy 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 massive Taiping rebellion, largely because it had the support of the scholar-gentry. Its mandate began slipping away after a series of foreign invasions that began in the 1840s. The Qing's inability to protect the country and its people, over seven decades of imperialist encroachment and exploitation, led the Manchu dynasty to lose the support of major segments of its people, and their acquiescence in its rule. The fact that the Manchu rulers were foreigners did not help their cause,

because during the last decade of the Qing rule, the people of China were consumed by patriotism, or by 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 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 lasted for over two thousand years. 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. Yet the very person entrusted to lead the new government would work to undermine it.

Yuan Shikai's Presidency

The formation of the Guomindang

Yuan Shikai accepted the position of the Provisional President of the Republic of China out of opportunism. He was not a convert to republicanism and only paid lip service to it. Yuan neither understood, nor wished to operate within, a system where the rule of 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, prosperous, and democratic China. 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 Yuan assumed the presidential office on 10 March 1912, he recommended his old friend, Tang Shaoyi, to serve as premier leading a cabinet of ten ministers. While Yuan's followers obtained the most powerful posts in the Tang cabinet, such as the Ministries of the Army and Navy, and of Internal Affairs, members of the Revolutionary Alliance, which Tang had recently joined, were appointed to lesser ministries, such as education, agriculture, forestry, and industry and commerce. Notable among them was Song Jiaoren, the minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, who was a leading drafter of the Provisional

Constitution. Song was a rising star of the Revolutionary Alliance, who, at age 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 puppet. 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 were associated with, this group of political activists in southern China. 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 undermining it by 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, not just a provisional one. Yuan succeeded in getting both his guests to declare their support for him. 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.

Before Yuan revealed his anti-republican tendencies more fully, the people of Yangtze China and further south were falsely 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 towards 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[7], or Nationalist Party. 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. While three hundred or so small 'parties'

[7] The earlier spelling is Kuomintang, often abbreviated to KMT.

had been formed, the Guomindang's main competitors were the Democratic Party (headed by the reformer Liang Qichao) and the Republican Party (mainly conservative constitutionalists). The last two merged to become the Progressive Party that, by and large, supported Yuan's 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 major rivals from the roughly 40 million people who met the qualifications to vote. As 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. But as he travelled to Beijing to be inaugurated, he was assassinated on 20 March 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. However, after they were caught and put on trial, letters and telegrams were found which pointed to Yuan Shikai himself as the instigator who had hired the assassins. On 24 April the Military Governor of Jiangsu published the evidence, which was documented by the foreign-controlled Shanghai Mixed Court.

In Nanjing, the outraged Sun Yat-sen called for military action against Yuan, but Huang Xing opposed such a move because of Yuan's military superiority. Infuriated at being exposed, Yuan secretly prepared for military action against several southern provinces where the Guomindang held sway. But military ventures were usually costly, and 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.

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: land taxes, salt taxes, and duties on the movement of goods (maritime customs on foreign trade, native customs on internal trade, and the *lijin*). Many of the provinces that had broken away from the Qing did not give the new republican government in Beijing all, or sometimes even a part, of its share of the land and other taxes they had 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 some 88,000,000 taels, while the maritime customs collection accounted for 23,000,000 taels, or 26% of the total. However, after 1901, the payment of the Boxer Indemnities, together with the service of foreign loans in connection with the Japanese Indemnity[8], 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 customs collection had grown 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 its custody and disposal. 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 three pre-1900 foreign loans contracted between 1895 and 1898 for paying the hefty Japanese indemnity of 1895, the foreign diplomatic corps in 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 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.

[8] The Boxer Indemnity was 450,000,000 taels, in various proportions and over 39 years, to the thirteen countries involved in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion. The Japanese Indemnity was 230,000,000 taels.

The new Chinese republic inherited from the Qing 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 several accounts in the I.G.'s name in a British Bank, which was to distribute the funds accumulated there, at regular intervals, and 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 drew 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 in 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, the foreign-managed MCS was able 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 Shikai's, turned to loans, both foreign and domestic, to keep their governments 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 through 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 26 April 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 several 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 only sufficient for the administrative expenses for the Beijing government for the next six months.

However, 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 would 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 provisional 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.

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, in June 1913 Yuan began moving troops south and threatening the Guomindang leaders with a punitive expedition if they did not cease troublemaking. 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 Yangtze River, 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 take shelter in Japan[9]. 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, and sometimes 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 give himself autocratic power. Targeting the newly elected members of the Congress, he induced the three major Guomindang rivals, the Democratic, Republican, and the Unification parties, to amalgamate

[9] Sun apparently 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, Sun divorced his first wife, and married Song Qingling, his faithful aide of many years. Sun returned to China in 1917 after the death of Yuan Shikai.

into one party, the Progressive Party, which could almost outvote the Guomindang. He bribed members of this party to vote for him as the president before the new Congress brought out a new constitution. Corruption aside, this was a highly irregular procedure, because the constitution was supposed to lay down laws governing the presidential election, the length of each term, and the number of terms the president was allowed to serve, as well as the president's 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 its members, who were forced to vote for Yuan for president before they were allowed to leave. This was how the provisional president Yuan Shikai became the actual president of the Republic of China. On the next day, Li Yuanhong was elected the vice-president.

Yuan's next step was to concentrate power into his hands by rendering the Congress impotent. Early in November, Yuan disqualified members of Congress who belonged to the Guomindang, and dissolved their organization, citing the party's role in the anti-government 'Second Revolution'. Removing the 438 Guomindang 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, the provincial assemblies, and self-governing bodies.

Notwithstanding his high-handed and dictatorial approach to governing, Yuan sought to maintain a façade of legality and legitimacy. In May 1914, he replaced the old 'Provisional Constitution of the Chinese Republic', by the 'Constitution of the Chinese Republic' produced by his appointees. This new constitution gave the authority and role of the premier, and 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 tools at Yuan's disposal. 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, with no need for a new election for the incumbent to continue in office for further terms. Before a president's term in office came to an end, the incumbent had the power to recommend a successor, without restriction as to 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 nearly 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

agricultural economy, expand education, and carry out judicial, penal and currency reforms, as had usually happened in the early days of any new dynasty.

In August 1914, after the First World War had broken out in Europe in July, 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 in 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', which threatened to turn China into a Japanese colony. Aware of Yuan's ambition to restore monarchy with himself as emperor, the Japanese offered to support him in exchange for his agreement to their demands. Yuan yielded to most of these demands, which required: 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 two 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. However, Yuan did not accept the demands that the Chinese government employ Japanese political, financial, and military advisers, and 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 most of the 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 desire 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. Great Britain saw this as an opportunity to prise Tibet away from China, while Russia saw the same regarding 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 took his stand on the sovereignty of the Republic of China, but 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 – reached an agreement 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 of the United States, President Wilson, considering the Reorganization Loan exploitative, withdrew American participation in the banking consortium that had offered it 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 putting an end to 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 there. His government also 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 consolidated his military power by abolishing the office of provincial military governor, and replacing, where possible, the incumbents with military officers loyal to him from a centralized Staff Office of generals, which he had set up at Beijing. Distrustful of Duan Qirui, who at the time headed the Beiyang Army, Yuan established later that year the Model Military, which was 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 2 September 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 so-called 'Representatives of the People' 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 Shikai as the emperor of Imperial China. After an initial show of reluctance, stressing his unworthiness, Yuan accepted the position on 12 December 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 should commence on 1 January 1916, which was to be the first year of *Hong Xian* (literally meaning Vast Law), which was the dynasty name Yuan had chosen.

Yuan's Death, the brief 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 revolted against Yuan in Yunnan, and eventually seized power. They declared the province independent and advanced the 'Protect the Nation' army, which they had organized against neighbouring provinces under Yuan's control. Soon four other provinces also followed suit. Sun Yat-sen directed members and supporters of the Revolutionary Party, which he founded in 1917 in Japan, to support the anti-Yuan movement politically and militarily in China. Yuan was alarmed, and 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 Yunnan. 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 his plan to restore the monarchy. Noting the strength of the anti-Yuan developments, the foreign powers, including even Japan, withdrew their support for him. Faced with such overwhelming opposition, Yuan terminated his dynastic rule on 23 March 1916. 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. But on 6 June 1916, after succumbing to a serious illness, Yuan died.

Upon Yuan's death, Vice-President Li Yuanhong assumed the presidency, 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 superior Yuan Shikai, 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, the United States entered the war on the side of Great Britain and France against Germany. Duan was persuaded by an American representative to do the same. Japan, interested in securing Duan's cooperation with Japanese expansion into the German sphere of influence in Shandong, also encouraged Duan to enter the war. The opportunity to expand his military force, promises of aid from Japan, as well as the potential freeing of the German Boxer Indemnity for domestic use, induced Duan to decide in favour of declaring war on Germany, even though the United States, casting a wary eye on Japanese expansionism, no longer desired China's entry into the war. With American support, President Li and the Congress opposed Duan on this issue. Duan doubled down, ordered 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 several 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 secret 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[10]. 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 made Li 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 1 July 1917, with the help of the scholar-reformer Kang Youwei, he put Puyi (the abdicated emperor Xuantong), then eleven years old, back onto the throne.

The restoration of the Qing created a violent storm across China. Most of the newspapers stopped publication in protest. 10,000 people gathered in Hunan calling for 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 often taken refuge in the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, wired Duan, restoring the latter's premiership, and requesting him to take military action against Zhang. Duan promptly advanced his troops on Beijing, capturing the city on 12 July, twelve days after

[10] The hairstyle worn by the Manchu people and required to be worn by all male subjects of Qing China.

Puyi's enthronement. General Zhang escaped to the safe haven of the Dutch Embassy in Beijing and would later return to his old base to operate as an independent warlord. Emperor Puyi, deposed but unpunished, was allowed to maintain his luxurious life in the Forbidden City, where he was required, by order of President Li, to receive a modern education from Western tutors.

After Duan returned to power as the premier and the minister of War, he was content 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 capable of fighting a war in Europe. However, Great Britain and France were in dire need of labourers 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 at the British naval base at Weihaiwei, and later at Qingdao, to ship tens of thousands of Chinese to northern France, where they worked long and arduous hours, digging trenches, building barracks and hospitals, unloading military cargos at the docks, and more. 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 labourers returned home finding themselves better equipped for life. 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 a heavy price for its 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 violated China's sovereignty and rendered China especially vulnerable to Japanese domination. In 1918, he signed 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 expected income from two new railways that the Japanese planned to build in Shandong, as part payment for 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 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 guise of a republican government.

He called a meeting of the original members of the twice-disbanded Congress, and military leaders from Guangzhou (more commonly 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 Yongxiang as Marshals. Sun then launched a military campaign against Duan in the name of protecting the 'Provisional Constitution'. Like his military expedition against Yuan Shikai 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.

The Warlord Era

The origins and characteristics of the era

The rule of Duan Qirui marked the beginning of a further stage of political breakdown in China. The country had entered 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 onwards. 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 Xiang Army and the Huai Army to save the 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. The balance of power shifted in favour of the provincial authorities, leading to an irreversible decline in the central government's power. Before the Revolution of 1911, the loyalty of the provincial leaders had kept potentially separatist tendencies in check. The Revolution of 1911 not only represented the final rejection of the Manchu monarchy; it also strengthened provincial independence. This tendency was kept temporarily at bay during the presidency of Yuan Shikai, by the hope that China might find a new unity under a democratic constitutional republic. However, the failure of the first leaders of the young Republic to provide China with a stable and viable alternative government at the centre, destroyed the tenuous bond between the centre and the 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. Political instability led to a heavy reliance on local armed forces for internal security, which in turn disturbed the balance of authority between civilian and military authorities in the government. This laid the groundwork for the ascendancy of the military. 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's political development.

An interregnum followed the demise of the civilian government, during which warring militarists vied for ascendancy. It lasted for over a decade, roughly from 1916 to 1928. At the start of this period, the area of north and central China was dominated by three major groups of warlords. Two cliques derived their power from the late Qing Beiyang Army. One of these was Duan Qirui's Anfu clique, that controlled Anhui, Fujian, Zhejiang, Shandong, Shaanxi, and several other areas. The other was Feng Guozhang's Zhili clique, that controlled Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Hubei. Later, the Zhili clique divided into two forces led by 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. There was also Yen Xishan, who had dominated the province of Shanxi as its military governor since the Revolution of 1911, and General Zhang Xun, who had supported Yuan's short-lived monarchical restoration, and who still controlled an army in Xuzhou in Jiangsu province. In the south and southwest of China, Tang Jiyao had his power base in Yunnan and Guizhou, Lu Rongting controlled Guangxi, Chen Jiongming dominated Guangdong, and 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 do so. 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 such a condition of general disorder, banditry became rife. In fact, there was little difference between the behaviour of the warlords' soldiers and that of common

bandits. In areas the warlords occupied, they would replace civilian administrators with their own appointees, especially those in charge of revenue collection. 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 Shikai's rule, returned with a vengeance, as some warlords found the drug a good source of revenue. The warlords existed 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 power struggles brought much suffering to the Chinese people.

With the possible exception of Feng Yuxiang and Yang Sen, the warlords were generally not anti-imperialist. They sometimes even 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.

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. 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. Throughout most of this period, the foreign powers continued to treat the Beijing government as the central government of China, regardless of who 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 in Beijing at all. Informal international recognition was given, in November 1924, to the Provisional government led by Duan Qirui, who returned to power after having overseen this government between 1916 and late 1918. In 1926 the imperial 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 naturally fell to the successive Beijing governments, partly because Beijing had been the headquarters of the civil administrative agencies and foreign diplomatic missions, and partly because the northern warlords were mostly in the mainstream of Chinese politics during this period. Until the imperial powers seriously considered, in the late 1920s, the Guomindang government's claim to be the

representative government of China, there was no real alternative. Another important reason was a financial one. 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 Shikai, depended on having a Chinese central government which could be held responsible.

For the warlords there were several advantages associated with the control of Beijing. First, it carried the prestige of acting for China on the international stage. Secondly, it gave the warlords concerned a certain amount of power in the appointment of regional officials. 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 banking 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 the government enjoyed.

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 in Beijing.

That the foreign-managed MCS was able to exist as a centralized organization and collect customs revenue in the 43 treaty ports spread across 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.

The disposal of the MCS surplus

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 not high, 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 in 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 and the above-mentioned foreign obligations. The 1912 agreement made no provision for the possibility that the balance might grow beyond the requirement of covering the administrative charges and the foreign obligations, and thus create a `customs surplus'. 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 any eventual customs surplus.

In 1917, Francis Aglen informed the Beijing government and the diplomatic corps of the existence of a 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 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 decided to give permission for the requested release. By following this procedure, the Beijing government obtained ten million Shanghai taels of customs surplus from the I.G.

In 1918, leaders of Sun Yat-sen's Guomindang government in Guangzhou submitted a claim for a share of the customs surplus. They argued that since some of the customs revenue was collected at ports under their government's jurisdiction, they should receive a proportional 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 had 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, the Guomindang's claim was ignored, whereupon they threatened to take over the foreign-managed customs at Guangzhou. The powers responded by threatening reprisals, and 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 corps also began to consider the force of the southern complaint which was, in essence, that the customs revenue which was collected in the south was being supplied to the northern government, which then used it to make war on the south.

As a result, the diplomatic corps refused to give Beijing the two million taels it requested from the surplus, citing the civil war between the North and the South as the reason. However, after hostilities ceased in January 1919, the diplomatic corps 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 several 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 Guangzhou 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 corps 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, and increasingly anxious to gain possession of the large customs surplus that was accumulating, Beijing admitted for the first time Guangzhou's claim for a share of this fund, in its grant application to the diplomatic corps. This time the foreign representatives gave their consent. In recognition of the customs income from the ports in the Guomindang-controlled area, the government in Guangzhou was given a proportional share of 13.7% of the total customs surplus of about twenty-one million Shanghai taels, while Beijing received 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 14 August 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 owed 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 domestic loans with which he was closely associated. The domestic loans issued with 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 to cover administrative expenses, 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.

In 1921 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 Beijing government to create a National Consolidated Debt Office with himself at the head, to take responsibility for the service of this debt by using the customs surplus. Although the Beijing government would have preferred to have the surplus for its own use, it agreed to the I.G.'s scheme because of the problem caused by the claim of the Guomindang regime in Guangzhou for a share of this revenue Giving security to so much outstanding domestic debt restored the credit of the Beijing government with the Chinese bondholders. Later, with Aglen's help, the Beijing government was able to raise more money through floating additional domestic loans. It also freed some other sources of revenue for its disposal. Because of these financial and other advantages, the competition for control of Beijing among the warlords was fierce.

What was Aglen's motive for using the customs surplus to secure and consolidate China's domestic debt? There were two main reasons. First, it saved him from having to deal with the politically explosive issue of sharing out this revenue between the governments of the North and the South. Secondly, he hoped that the Chinese banking interests that benefited from this scheme would provide him and the foreign customs

organisation with a Chinese 'anchor', if and when the foreign powers, Great Britain in particular, decided not to use force to protect the MCS and his position in it. This was a distinct possibility in the 1920s, as imperialism was being forced to retreat in the face of militant Chinese nationalism.

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 Washington Naval Conference that was held from 12 November 1921 to 2 February 1922 in Washington D.C. with nine nations participating – the United States, Great Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and China.[11] At this conference, the financially strained Beijing government pressed for concessions from the treaty powers on customs tariffs. Its delegates presented a compelling case for adjusting the treaty tariff, which was based on prices which had prevailed several decades back under the Qing, to reflect 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 to 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 a treaty was ratified by all nine attending countries. This concession was 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, had been introduced in the 1850s to finance the war against the Taiping[12]. The Chinese delegates regarded the Washington surtaxes as a temporary 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.[13] 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 these issues on Chinese customs tariffs were to be resolved at a special conference in the near future.

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[11] For a standard work on this subject, see Westel W. Willoughby, *China at the Conference A Report*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1922.

[12] The bloodiest civil war in world history, between the Qing and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom; it lasted from 1850 to 1864 and left over twenty million dead.

[13] 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*, Generic, 1966.

Although the Beijing government wanted to hold the Special Tariff conference as soon as possible 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 government in Beijing, dominated by Duan Qirui, was able to convene the Special Tariff conference, after he agreed, despite Chinese public outcry against it, to pay the European nations in gold.

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 this: 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 to 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.

Regarding the abolition of *lijin*, the Chinese demanded additional surtaxes to compensate for the revenue shortfall, and this was also intended 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 about granting the Washington surtaxes to China, before this conference came to an end sometime between April and June 1926. During this time, the Beijing government, which had sponsored the conference, ceased to exist, as a result of changes in the balance of power in northern 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. With the help of the Chinese press and the agitations of many citizens' organizations and pressure groups in Beijing, their effort was successful. 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 1 January 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 in Nanjing.

Chinese disappointment at Versailles

While China was paralyzed by the demoralizing chaos of warlord contention, World War I ended in Europe with the armistice of 11 November 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, commemorating the Germans killed by the Boxers. Patriotic Chinese had high expectations for the Paris Peace Conference which began in January 1919, hoping that China would regain its sovereign rights which had been yielded to the Germans by the Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century. 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 Chinese governments, one in Beijing and one in Guangzhou, was utterly unprepared for the shocking revelations with which they were confronted at Versailles. The chief of the Japanese delegation announced that in return for Japanese naval assistance to the allied powers, Great Britain, Italy, and France, had signed, early in 1917, a secret agreement that assured Japan of their support for Japan's claims regarding the disposal of the German rights in Shandong after the war. Compounding the bad news, the Japanese informed the conference delegates of a series of secret agreements concluded between 1917 and 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. On 30 April 1919 President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, who had previously been sympathetic to China's argument, agreed to join Britain's David Lloyd George and France's Georges Clemenceau in authorizing the transfer to Japan of all Germany's rights in Shandong. This decision, imposed by the great powers, 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 1 May, patriotic Chinese were outraged at the double betrayal by the Western powers and Duan Qirui's government. Hundreds of political and commercial associations in China, and Chinese communities and students overseas, showered the Chinese delegates with telegrams protesting against the decision at Versailles and petitioning them not to sign the treaty. On the day the Chinese delegates were due to sign the document, Chinese demonstrators and students surrounded their

hotel, preventing them from attending the signing ceremony. Ultimately, the delegation did refuse to put a signature to the treaty of Versailles.[14].

The May Fourth movement

Indignation at the Versailles treaty settlement, and concern over the mounting Japanese encroachment on China, moved the student activists in Beijing to bring forward to 4 May the date for a demonstration, which had been planned for 7 May 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 3.000 student activists from Beijing University and many other institutions of higher education gathered in Tiananmen Square (also known as the Gate of Heavenly Peace) in a highly-charged mood, 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 Shandong issue, and alert them to China's predicament. After being stopped by police and foreign guards, they marched instead to the home of Cao Rulin, then Minister of Communications, who had negotiated huge loans from Japan. Finding him absent, they vented their rage by setting fire to his house, and gave another pro-Japanese high-ranking official, whom they considered 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 in 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. (Even Beijing University, one of the leading educational institutions in China, only began to admit women in 1920.) Soon students of other major cities in China organized similar student unions, and by June representatives of thirty student unions from across China met and organized a Student Union of the Republic of China for co-ordinating their political activities. As successors of the scholar-gentry-

[14] At this point neither China and nor the world could have anticipated that the United States would sponsor a conference in Washington, between November 1921 and February 1922, with the primary objective of stabilizing the international situation in east Asia, through limiting Japan's post-war gains. As we have seen, the Washington Naval Conference was also concerned with China's custom tariffs. The Nine-Power Treaty signed at the Washington Naval 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 that prevailed in Japan from 1917 to 1925, which led to a shift in its foreign policy, Japan was in a cooperative mood at this conference. Japan signed the Washington Treaty, which obliged it to withdraw the notorious Twenty-one Demands from China and return to China what it had seized from the former German sphere of influence in Shandong. In exchange for Japan's concessions, the powers accepted 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.

officials, who were the ruling elites of traditional China, students in modern educational establishments viewed themselves as potential leaders of the Chinese society, responsible for China's future. They emerged as a new political force, and their example inspired others in the scholarly professions, such as teachers, writers, and journalists, to organize themselves into similar associations for political mobilization.

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 frequently working in small 'Groups of Ten for National Salvation'. In late May and early June, they called a strike that closed schools in more than 200 cities across China. In June, the warlord government in Beijing tried to suppress the protests by force. It arrested around 1150 student activists, and locked them up, even using a part of Beijing University as a prison. This response only aggravated the situation. In Shanghai alone, merchants closed their shops for a week and, even in the absence of labour unions, around 60,000 workers from more than forty enterprises went on strike in sympathetic support for the students. The 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.

Chinese nationalism

The May Fourth Movement is widely regarded as a significant milestone in the development of Chinese nationalism, a phenomenon that had begun long before 4 May 1919, and would continue. The demonstrations against Japan 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, developed nationalism in a modern 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 power(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, and 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, a political party, or all three, which promote the cause of liberating the nation – whether it be an ethnic group or a 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 own past, and for the attainment of certain common goals for the future.

For two years or more after the May Fourth demonstrations, a 'New Cultural Movement', precipitated by that 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 itself in a world dominated by modernized nations which had been preying on it since the 1840s. It was a renewed attempt to identify China's weaknesses, and the strategies to be used to address them.

For half of the nineteenth 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. They decided that the way to address the problem was, first, to purchase these modern weapons from Western nations, and then build factories to produce the same in China. When this approach proved insufficient, they supplemented it with western-style military training and drilling of the troops, 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, but they wanted the essential aspects of China's culture and way of life to remain unchanged.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the limited self-strengthening measures had failed to make China sufficiently strong militarily to defend against the modern imperialist 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, by 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 and imperial exploitation.

Meanwhile, a new generation of revolutionary nationalists, grappling with the old problem of China's survival and revitalization in the modern world, concluded that China's old culture and tradition was at the root of the problem. Key Confucian teachings came under attack. The hierarchical 'Three Bonds' subordinated the subject to the ruler, the son to the father, and the wife to the husband, each embodying the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, and obedience. These bonds corresponded to the most important of the Confucian 'Five Relationships'. But such ideas were regarded by the new generation of revolutionaries as relics of the past, which had led to the 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 Fourth 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 marketplace of the intellectual and cultural world of the West with open minds, 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 Beijing University, where young professors and students produced many influential books, and translations into Chinese of Western works. Soon reform-minded people across China were caught up in this intellectual ferment. They formed associations and brought out publications to propagate their ideas. Many new periodicals and newspapers appeared on the scene, and spread across China, 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 reach those who were less educated. They 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-July1921) 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 Russel lectured in China, from October 1920 to July 1921, advocating state socialism, a subject that was drawing the attention of Chinese radicals.

The Chinese who turned against China's traditional culture had been 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 new possibilities in art, literature, and other areas of contemporary Chinese culture. Individual development aside, most reformers focused their attention on the larger and more urgent societal issues.

One group of reformers favoured a rational, pragmatic, and piece-by-piece approach to engineer changes in China. They wanted to concentrate on critical problem solving, and then prescribing a cure for each problem separately. 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 the United States, 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, to be achieved through educating its people, building new institutions of learning, spreading knowledge of modern science, and establishing democratic institutions. He was sceptical of socialism and other doctrinaire approaches to 'liberate' or totally transform China in one stroke.

It was difficult for the reform agenda of the gradualists to make any headway in warlord-controlled China. The Beijing government ignored their manifestos for guaranteeing civil liberties. Their impact on the society was greater in the realm of culture, particularly as they actively promoted writing in the vernacular. 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. 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 hopes for a brighter future seemed to elude them perpetually. Lu Xun, one of the most distinguished writers of the May Fourth 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 did not wake 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 doubted 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 Fourth generation. It came from the Soviet Union, which was established in December 1922 as a Socialist Federation.

The `import' of Marxism-Leninism

Marxism did not attract much attention at first from the Chinese activists, because this theory posits 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, Vladimir Lenin's success might have lessons for the Chinese. In January 1918, a Guomindang newspaper in Shanghai paid tribute to what became the October Revolution, and Sun Yat-sen sent a personal note of congratulation to Lenin.

The developments in Russia excited Li Tazhao, the head librarian (and later a professor) at Beijing University. Li was born into a peasant family in 1889. To acquire a modern education, he had to sell his meagre family possessions. Having studied political economy at Waseda University in Japan[15], and won distinction as a writer and editor, he was appointed to the librarianship in late 1917, and from July 1920 he began lecturing on history and politics as a professor. 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. 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 1918, Li proceeded to set up an informal group, consisting mostly of faculty members and students at 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*, and other texts.

Among the dozen or so of the regular attendants was Chen Duxiu, the dean of Beijing University. Born into a wealthy family of an official in 1879, Chen had a traditional education in the classics, before the emergence of modern schools in China. Like many intellectuals 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 influential literary magazine *New Youth*, which sought 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 fatherly figure was expected to rule benevolently and wisely, supported by a system of ethics assumed to be universal and immanent. By contrast, in a 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, with which educated Chinese like Chen had

[15] According to information published by Beijing University, Li cut short his education at Waseda University, to participate in the anti-Yuan movement.

become familiar, Chen feared that the traditional Chinese system of morality and governance rendered China unfit to compete in the fierce struggle for existence. To save China, Chen advocated wholesale borrowing from the West. Like his colleague and friend, Hu Shi, Chen wanted to see 'Mr. Science' and 'Mr. Democracy' playing major roles in China's transformation. He also actively supported and popularized the vernacular style of writing. During the May Fourth student demonstration, Chen was imprisoned for three months for handing out 'inflammatory' leaflets, which demanded the 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 1 May 1919 issue of the *New Youth*, which had a special focus on Marxism, 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 implied the lack of a large urban proletariat, which, according to Marxist orthodoxy, was to be the main force behind a revolution led by a Communist party. To deal with this problem, in early 1920 Li developed a new understanding of Marxism 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 exploitation by capitalists of one's own nation. As regards the Russians and the Chinese in their revolutionary activism, he drew another parallel. Noting that 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, as their Russian predecessors had done in earlier phases of the Russian revolution. Many answered his call, as his study group grew in popularity. By the early 1920s some students at Beijing University established a 'Mass Education Speech Corps' for this purpose.

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 when he sent two agents, Grigori Voitinsky and Yang Mingzhai to China, after he had set up the Third International of the Communist Party (the Comintern) of the Soviet Union in 1919, for promoting socialist revolutions in the world at large. By 1920, Lenin had come to the view that it was not necessary for less developed 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 met, which included socialists, progressives, anarchists, and Guomindang members. They formed the core of what would soon become China's 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 a language school were established as cover for recruitment, and for teaching Russian to young Chinese radicals 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, had embraced Marxism and turned 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 the study of translated texts of Western Enlightenment thinkers. Mao 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 university library. During most of 1920, Mao moved 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 the director of a primary school in Changsha. In 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 as a writer, editor, and leader of workers' guilds.

Between 1919 and 1920, over 1.000 Chinese students joined a work-study programme in France. Zhou Enlai, who would later go on to serve as the first premier of the People's Republic of China, was among

them. Zhou was a leader of the May Fourth student protest in Tianjin, and after a brief period in prison for raiding a local government office in early 1919, he went to Paris. 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 of the group. 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, also 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. Radical students from Hunan and Sichuan published underground journals of their own. Deng Xiaoping was given an 'honorary' title of doctor of mimeography by his fellow students 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 other Chinese in Europe to follow suit.

In July 1921, the Chinese Communist party activists called a plenary meeting in Shanghai, to which Mao Zedong was invited as the representative of Hunan. The meeting, which is commonly regarded as the official establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), first took place in secret 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, Henk Sneevliet, who was known by his pseudonym 'Maring'. 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. The statement emphasized the central role of the proletariat, which was supposed to be led by a 'militant and disciplined party' representing it. Translated into action, it would mean that the Chinese Communist Party was to become a Soviet-style highly disciplined party, and that it must actively enrol urban industrial workers into the party and lead them into militant actions. Moreover, the proletariat was required to lead the bourgeois democratic movement which, in China at that time, was led by the Guomindang.

Site of the first National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Shanghai, 23 July 1921 (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 10 November 2023 from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Site_of_the_First_National_Congress_of_the_Chinese_Communist_Party)

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? The practical choice available to the party delegates to decide, was whether to ally their party with the Guomindang. They carried out prolonged debates on this matter. Some were against the alliance proposal because the Guomindang party and the Communist party each represented a class that opposed the other. The majority of the delegates argued 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-partisan collaboration. This decision paved the way for members of the Communist party to collaborate with the Guomindang later. Although neither Chen Duxiu nor Li Dazhao attended this meeting, both were regarded as founders of the CCP, and 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, carried out recruitment, and tried to pursue the party agenda. Although by 1922 the CCP had only about 200 members inside China, a new chapter had begun. During that year many Chinese Communists from France returned home. Among those was Xiang Jingyu, who was skilful in organizing woman workers, many of whom were employed 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 by the Communist party. 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. Gender equality was an unrealized ideal then, and it still is.

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, one piece at a time, as advocated by the pro-Western Hu Shi, seemed far too slow and emotionally unsatisfying to the Communists, 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 imperialist nations of the West for world domination - undermined their previously idealized image of the West, and their admiration for it. 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. Seeing their country 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 weakness in technological, political, economic, or cultural areas. After being exposed to the theories of Marxism-Leninism, in works such as Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, the Chinese radicals blamed imperialism as practised by Western capitalist nations and Japan for China's lack of development.

It was not difficult for these Chinese to find evidence of foreign exploitation of China, which rendered Marxism-Leninism convincing. Both the CCP and the Guomindang were alarmed by the degree of foreign control of Chinese commercial and mining industries. The following examples showed the severity of 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 products dearly. It seemed 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 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.

Patriotic, left-leaning Chinese used Marxism to reject Western imperialism through its concept of 'historical materialism', which 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 Marxist theory, which holds that societies progress through stages of class struggle (primitive, slave-owning, feudal, capitalist, and finally socialist) between the ruling class and the exploited class, for the ownership of the means of production. 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 also because it provided a solution that might be achievable through imminent 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 problematic to many in China, since the capitalist class was still relatively small. Although China's historical trajectory did not fit neatly into the Marxist 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 a successful 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, not just in their homeland but also in other parts of the world. To the passionately patriotic youths of the May Fourth generation, devoted to China's salvation and regeneration, the discipline, dedication, and self-sacrifice required by the Communist party were values they would gladly embrace. They were ready for political action, particularly of the kind that would accelerate the transformation of China, 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 had been further aroused in 1918 by the Russian offer, later rescinded, to give up their sphere of influence in China's Northeast. In July 1919, from the Russian foreign office, Leo Karakhan declared an offer 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 negotiating 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 positions, went a long way towards winning Chinese goodwill and trust. [16]

The Chinese Communists' search for a revolutionary partner

After the founding of the CCP in Shanghai in July 1921, branches were soon set up in Nanjing, Changsha, Jinan, Wuhan, Guangzhou, 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 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, but without having to go through the bourgeois democratic revolutionary stage. He was also reluctant 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 China. 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 Russia's interest to have a strong China to help them secure their southern border against the fiercely anti-Communist and expansionist Japanese. The Russians had tried negotiating diplomatically with the warlord-controlled Beijing government, which recognized the Soviet Union in 1924, but 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 second 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'. The CCP acknowledged that it was necessary to form a 'united front' with the Guomindang and other democratic

[16] According to Jonathan Dermot Spence, late Professor of History at Yale University, although the Soviets later changed their mind and denied that they had made the offer to return the railways without compensation, the Chinese peoples' generally positive feelings towards the Soviet Union were not much affected.

forces to achieve its goals of ending warlordism and imperialism and bringing about a united and independent China.

The first United Front between the Guomindang and Chinese Communists

In 1921, Maring went south to contact 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 revived the Guomindang, with himself in overall command. In 1920, he directed the Guangdong warlord, Chen Jiongming, to drive out other warlords from the southwest, and 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 he planned once again to launch a military expedition for national unification. But 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 mutinied and bombarded the presidential office. Sun retreated to a naval ship, and fought 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, which he had been seeking 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. 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, bringing an infusion of new blood to strengthen his organization. After Sun agreed to reorganize the Guomindang on 'democratic principles' 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 after further discussions with Comintern agents, Sun decided to accept Soviet help, and adopt an official policy that permitted Chinese Communists to join the Guomindang. In June 1923, Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, among other prominent Communists, joined the Guomindang, after the CCP had held a special meeting on 29 and 30 August to settle details about the cooperation.

In February 1923, a group of militarists from several provinces of southern and central China forced Sun's betrayer, 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 parliament, because many of its members had left for 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. This was to be Sun's last attempt to form a government, but this time it was different, because the Soviet Union had come to his aid. On 6 October 1923, a veteran Comintern agent, Michael Borodin, arrived at Guangzhou to guide the cooperation between the CCP and Guomindang. Sun named him the Guomindang's 'special adviser'.

In January 1924, Sun convened the first national congress of the revived Guomindang in Guangzhou, which was attended by 165 delegates, fifteen of them being 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), Democracy, and People's Livelihood (which became 'socialism'). The congress adopted three major strands of party policy: alliance with the Soviet Union, cooperation with Chinese Communists, 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, strengthening Sun's position and tightening the party's disciplinary structure. Under his leadership, the Guomindang adopted the Russian idea of 'democratic centralism', where decisions passed by a majority in the relevant committees would become binding on all members. Borodin also extended the party organization to the major cities with regional headquarters, and actively recruited new members. Many Chinese Communists were elected to the Guomindang's Central Executive Committee. In this powerful committee, Borodin created separate bureaus for handling the affairs related to women, youths, and the military, as well as 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 among his important constituents. Some of Sun's overseas supporters questioned 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 collaborating with people whose vision of class war and state socialism he did not share.

A new party army

Another 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 to become the Guomindang's military arm. 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, and this 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 Whampoa Military Academy, inaugurated in June 1924. (*The China Project*: retrieved on 10 November 2023 from https://thechinaproject.com/2021/06/16/the-profound-legacy-of-chinas-whampoa-military-academy/)

The new military academy was to adopt the techniques developed by the Soviet Red Army to train the cadets, and to organize an army. To learn the Soviet military methodology, Chiang Kai-shek went to Russia with a special Guomindang delegation and stayed there for several months. After his return, he was

appointed the school's first commandant. The cadets were recruited from among 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 distinguished military career commanding the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Trying to keep a balance of influence between the Guomindang and the CCP in the academy, Borodin 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 the principles that guided the Guomindang and its nationalistic goals.

On 15 October 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 Guomindang demonstrators, and 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 Jiongming. Their operations led to the capture of Chen's main base in Shantou (Swatow) in March. Three months later, they defeated two other warlords, who had attempted to capture Guangzhou. These latter engagements enabled them to capture 17,000 prisoners and 16,000 guns.

The death of Sun Yat-sen

The performance of this new army gave Sun hope that his vision of a Guomindang-led military expedition to unite China might at last be realized. However, in January 1925, while he was in Beijing, accompanied by Borodin, Wang Jingwei, and his wife Song Qingling, to take part in a national reconstruction conference called by the warlord, Feng Yuxiang, he became seriously ill. After surgery was performed, it was discovered that he had terminal liver cancer. He died in March 1925, aged fifty-nine, leaving a last will and testament that was likely to have been drafted by Wang Jingwei. After his death, the Guomindang honoured Sun as the 'father of the nation' (*guo fu*), and his will was solemnly read aloud on formal state occasions.

Since Sun had not named or groomed an heir to inherit his mantle as the leader of the Guomindang, the question of who would be his successor was a pressing issue. Prominent Guomindang 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 successes of the forces led by Whampoa cadets. Having incorporated members of the Communist party

and adopted anti-imperialism as a policy, there was going to be a rising tide of Guomindang-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, the struggle for power within the left and right wings of the Guomindang, and between both 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. They had worked actively to politicize and organize the peasants and workers. It was not difficult to radicalize and arouse impoverished peasants and wretched workers to participate in mass movements. The Guomindang rightists, on the other hand, represented the interests of the landlords and the 'bourgeoisie'. Collective 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 Guomindang rightists strongly opposed the Communist ideology. In order not to offend the Guomindang right, the Soviet Union ordered the Comintern agents to tone down revolutionary activities of the CCP in the countryside.

Labour militancy and the Guomindang Left

Despite the political instability, China's modern industry, and with it the size of the urban labour force, grew significantly in the early twentieth century. Before 1911, there were between five and six hundred thousand industrial workers. By 1919, the number had increased to over two million. Poor working conditions and low pay led to spontaneous workers' strikes. Between 1911 and May 1919, there were more than 130 strikes, mostly small in 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, often leading 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. In May of that year, a Japanese-owned textile mill in Shanghai locked out a group of Chinese workers, who had gone on strike. The angry 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 many arrests. On 30 May thousands of workers and students congregated outside the British-controlled police station of the Shanghai 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. But just ten seconds later, before the crowd could disperse, he ordered his men to fire, killing eleven and wounding twenty of the protesters. This was remembered as the infamous May Thirtieth Incident in China.

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

In June, the outrage in Shanghai prompted the Guomindang left and the Communists, together with labour leaders in Guangzhou, to initiate a large-scale strike in Hong Kong against the British. On 23 June 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, 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.

In the past, the British had relied on gunboat diplomacy to force the Chinese government to comply with their demands and suppress unrest that could damage British interests. But this strategy was hardly feasible in the now fragmented China under the weak Beijing government. Responding with violence would only

exacerbate the situation, and deploying a large military force was too costly. 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.

The British decided to avoid further bellicose actions that might inflame the anti-imperialist passion of the Chinese public, who were, after all, customers of British products. They were hostile to the Guomindang government in Guangzhou, especially after this government started to foment strikes and support anti-imperialist activities. But they calculated that they might have to develop a working relationship with the Guomindang, 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. On 20 August 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, the 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 in the party, prompted some to speculate that a competitor for power, the Guomindang right, or the British, were responsible for his death. Whoever was behind his assassination remains an unsolved mystery.

Despite the loss of Liao, the Guomindang left and the Communists continued 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 second party congress held in January 1926, 168 out of 278 delegates were 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, 14 were 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.

The Ascendancy of Chiang Kai-shek

The rise of the Guomindang right

Notwithstanding the left's apparent strength, the power of the party's centre and right should not be underestimated: its core was the crucial 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. They

were hostile to the Communists, and 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 owners decamped to Shanghai and Beijing, because of Guangzhou'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, where they declared their intention to drive out Borodin and the Communists from their party.

In 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*, declared martial law in Guangzhou, stationed armed personnel at strategic points, disarmed the workers' pickets, and detained more than thirty Russian advisers. He also suspended the publication of CCP-affiliated newspapers and obliged a number of senior Chinese Communist political commissars at Whampoa to undergo 'retraining'. Within a few days, after this demonstration of his power, Chiang let normalcy return. Realizing the importance of Soviet military support in the planned expedition against the northern warlords, he was not yet ready to break with the Soviet Union. In early April, he declared that he still had faith in the alliance with the Soviet Union.

During this tense period, Borodin was away in Beijing conferring with his Russian colleagues in secret on Comintern strategy. When Borodin returned in late April, Chiang made several demands: that he provide a list of the current CCP members to the Executive Committee of the Guomindang; forbid Guomindang members to join the CCP; ban CCP criticism of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People; and report Comintern orders to the CCP to a Guomindang committee. Furthermore, Chiang asked Borodin to accept that, in the future, no Communist was to be the head of the Guomindang or lead any bureau of its government. Borodin had to agree to all of Chiang's demands, because Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, was locked in a power struggle with Leon Trotsky during this time and 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 Guomindang would have constituted such a failure.

Chiang's coup enhanced his position in the Guomindang 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 Guomindang. The CCP leader Chen Duxiu, who regarded the Guomindang-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. Forced to remain, they placed their hopes on being able eventually to subvert and take over the Guomindang 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.

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 Guomindang, became the chairman of the Nationalist Government in 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. 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' that would eventually unite China. To Sun's heirs, this remained the mission of the revived Guomindang that they were duty-bound to carry out, when the time was right. After Chiang won the support of the Guomindang leadership for the Northern Expedition, Chen Duxiu and some other Communist leaders found reasons to oppose such a move. 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 Guomindang as his internal political battle with Trotsky continued.

Chiang Kai-shek (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 10 November 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Kai-shek)

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 the organization of urban workers and rural peasants to sabotage the warlord forces in support of the advancing 'National Revolution Army'.

By the summer of 1926, nearly 8,000 Whampoa cadets and 85,000 armed men were 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. Chiang Kai-shek served as the Commander-in-Chief of this mixed force. Since the alliance with the Soviet Union was still intact, the Soviet Union supported the Guomindang's Northern Expedition with arms and military advisers, the latter numbering 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 so many troops supplied over vast distances, where railways and even proper roads did not exist, many transport labourers was needed. These were recruited from the strikers in Guangzhou and peasants en 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.Song,[17] the brother-in-law of Sun Yat-sen. Song, a graduate of Harvard University, had worked in both international and Chinese banking. As the finance minister of the Guomindang Government in 1925, he had skilfully managed to increase the taxes collected from the Guomindang-controlled area. Taxes from shipping and kerosene alone brought in 3.6 million yuan per month. He had also floated bonds to raise funds for his government.

After suitable preparations, on 1 July 1926 the Guomindang's 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 several other major warlords were omitted, as some of them were either allies of the Guomindang, or potential allies that could help protect the flanks of its advancing troops or fight 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 Yangtze 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 11 July. To maintain the momentum of their military thrust, they outmanoeuvred the warlord forces

[17] Also known as Song Ziwen.

blocking their advance to the triple-city of Wuhan, which they surrounded in August. From September to 10 October, Hanyang, Hankou, and Wuchang fell successively to the Guomindang-led forces, partly through fighting and partly by the defection of some of the defending officers. Soon after, Chiang turned his attention to 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. 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 with the capture of Fuzhou, through a combination of military action, defection from the enemies' ranks, and persuasion of the militarists to support the Guomindang.

Moving ahead of the forces of the Northern Expedition were the CCP and Guomindang propagandists, whose task was to arouse workers and peasants to support the patriotic cause and to sabotage the warlords. For fear of offending the Guomindang 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 Guomindang activists for mass movements of strikes, agitations, and uprisings, often before the arrival of the troops. With the help of the Guomindang 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 could bring a city to a standstill, closing its factories, docks, municipal government, transport, and other services. The workers hoped that the new regime under the Guomindang would bring them economic improvement, if not also political empowerment. However, the militarists controlling these cities mostly suppressed these union activities with violence, killing and locking up their leaders.

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 Guomindang rule. Five of these – Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong - by military action, and two - Guangxi and Guizhou - by successfully persuading the militarists in charge to join up with the Guomindang. In December the Guomindang moved the government from Guangzhou to Wuhan. Once the Communists and many left-wing members of this party moved to Wuhan, the city became another 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 in 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 the party; several members of the Executive Committee 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 the Northern Expedition. Chiang Kai-shek was in favour of an immediate two-pronged drive into Shanghai, which involved going eastward along the Yangtze River and northward from Hangzhou. If successful, Chiang would be able to tap the taxable income of the Yangtze 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 sympathetic warlord forces, 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 ended 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. Chiang returned to pursue his own plan unilaterally.

Before launching his offensive towards Shanghai, Chiang received financial support from the head of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, who visited him in Nanchang. He also negotiated with the leading members of the Bank of China in Shanghai and secured additional funding. He met with the chief detective of the French Concession, a shadowy figure of the underworld, who had connections with the Green Gang (*Qingbang*), a powerful secret society that had become rich through control of opium, prostitution, and gambling rackets, under the guise of legitimate businesses. The gang was able to provide critical resources and assistance.

Chiang's rapid drive to the Yangtze 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, Zhang Zuolin, the warlord of the Northeast, moved through the pass at Shanhaiguan into Zhili to rule over Beijing. Zhang was so vehemently anti-Communist that, on 6 April 1927, he sent his military police to raid the Soviet embassy, arresting and killing Li Dazhao and some other Chinese Communists, who were seeking shelter there. Although Zhang Zuolin and other militarists in northern and central China found the Guomindang too radical and revolutionary to co-exist with, they nevertheless struggled to collaborate with one another to counter the party's likely northward advance. In the spring of 1927, Zhang had considered despatching a large army south to crush the newly arrived Guomindang in the Yangtze Valley, by making use of the Beijing-Wuhan railway. He could easily have done so, but 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 to join the party in 1926. Yan Xishan, who had 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.

Chiang's bloody coup against the radicals in Shanghai

As Chiang finally started his Shanghai campaign, the city was engulfed in a wave of labour agitations. In February 1927, workers in Shanghai, led by members of the CCP, called a general strike that paralyzed the city for two days, in support of the seizure of Hangzhou by Guomindang troops. The local warlords arrested some 300 of the strikers and executed about 20. Despite 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 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 the recent incidents. Early in 1927, large Chinese crowds, 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, Guomindang troops occupied Nanjing, and killed six foreigners after marching into several foreign consulates. British and American gunboats shelled the city to stake out an evacuation route for foreign nationals, killing several Chinese in the process. While the safety of the foreigners was not absolutely guaranteed, there was an ample display of foreign military capability. In the spring of 1927, around 22,000 foreign police and armed forces were stationed in Shanghai, and out of the 169 foreign warships in Chinese waters, 42 were in Shanghai.

On 21 March, 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. The insurgents occupied railway stations, cut power and telephone lines, occupied police stations, and fought the retreating warlord forces. They succeeded in taking over the city without harming the foreigners, which they were under strict orders not to do. On the next day, the Guomindang troops entered Shanghai with the city already taken by friendly forces.

Viewing the Guomindang as a regime that would support rather than persecute them, the General Labour Unions came out into the open. On 27 March they held a public meeting to inaugurate their new headquarters in a former guildhall in Shanghai, with 1,000 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 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 Shanghai bankers. He even resorted to squeezing some of the wealthy Shanghai capitalists, by holding members of their families for ransom.

Chiang proceeded to finalize the plan, which he likely had already discussed with the leaders of the notorious Green Gang in Nanchang, for a bloody coup to steer the revolution towards a direction favourable to 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 in the French concession. This organization served as a front for a force of about 1,000 well-armed men, awaiting orders to act. Meanwhile, Chiang moved the army units, that were known to sympathize with the workers, out of the city.

On 12 April 1927, before dawn, the heavily armed men of the Society for Common Progress, dressed in blue civilian clothes with white armbands, launched a wave of attacks on the headquarters of all 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 Duxiu's elder son was among the victims. Soon afterwards, the General Labour Union was 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. When the Guomindang in Wuhan, dominated by its left wing, had removed Chiang from his top civil and military posts at its third plenary meeting of the second session in March, Chiang defied it by setting up, on 18 April 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 supposed to lead the masses together with the CCP to achieve the 'bourgeois democratic revolution' (which Stalin regarded as the proper stage of revolution for China at that point), while expelling 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 that the CCP should proceed 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 Duxiu was able to work out a joint declaration with Wang to reaffirm the bond between the Guomindang and Chinese Communists. However, the leftists in 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 Guomindang-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. Restrained by the Guomindang, the Communists were able neither 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 Guomindang, 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 Guomindang leftists further to the left, so as to achieve an agrarian revolution through seizure of land by the masses from below, to recruit workers and peasants into the Guomindang in order to weaken or push out the old guard, and to mobilize 20,000 Communists and 50,000 revolutionary workers and peasants into an effective army to be led by student commanders. Roy unwisely revealed the contents of this telegraph to Wang Jinwei, who immediately took steps to curb the power of the CCP and radical peasant movements.

Although the leaders of the left-wing Guomindang regime, like the Communists, had been supporting workers' anti-imperialist movements in Wuhan, by the spring of 1927 their zeal for revolution had cooled. Instead, they were more concerned with consolidating their positions and power vis-a-vis Chiang Kai-shek in Nanjing. 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 funding than they were able to provide. They could only raise a fraction of the 15 million yuan per month they needed to support their civil and military administration. Even though their government was in serious financial difficulty, they still proceeded with an ambitious plan of joining their army with that of General Feng Yuxiang on a northern expedition targeting Beijing. On 18 April 1927 the Wuhan government led by Wang Jingwei despatched an army that met Feng's troops on 1 June at Zhengzhou, where Feng and Wang conferred on their future cooperation. Feng urged the two separate Guomindang governments to mend their relationship. As a condition of his continuing support for Wuhan, Feng demanded the removal of the Communists from the Guomindang.

Since the leaders of the Wuhan government had already developed a deep mistrust and antipathy towards the Communists, 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 with the Communists. This situation prompted Borodin, Roy and other Comintern agents to start their long journey back 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, and to instigate peasant uprisings in the countryside.

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. Several 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 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 against the Guomindang government 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 the Jinggan Mountain in Hunan.

Slightly earlier, in August 1927, a larger scale Communist insurrection occurred at the former base of Chiang Kai-shek in Nanchang. About 20,000 troops led by several Communist generals mutinied, 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 career as the foremost commander of the Red Army. After holding out for 10 days, the rebels were defeated by anti-Communist forces. This Communist army retreated south and captured Shantou 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 China's revolution, Stalin ordered Qu Qiubai to stage another insurrection. Qu obediently engineered an uprising at Guangzhou. On 11 December 1927 Communist troops and radical workers seized the barracks, police stations, and the post and telegraph offices of the city, which was declared a soviet of workers, peasants, and soldiers. This radical commune in 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 unification of China under Chiang's leadership

The purging of the Communists brought hope that the two Guomindang governments might merge and strengthen their bid to unite China. However, Wang Jingwei demanded Chiang's removal as a condition for unity. After a serious military setback at Xuzhou, Chiang faced opposition from the Guangxi militarists, who had joined the Guomindang Northern Expedition, and from one of his own Whampoa commanders.

In August 1927, Chiang decided that it would be wise for him to step down temporarily, while keeping a finger on the pulse of political events, so as to make a come-back later.

He used the time profitably by going to Japan, to finalize his marriage contract with Song Meiling, a graduate of Wellesley College, and the youngest daughter of Charlie Song, whose widow was then living in Japan. The Song family offered Chiang important connections and added a touch of glamour to his dour military image. This was a time when successful Chinese with American backgrounds were held in high social esteem in the modernizing Chinese treaty-port society, a segment of Chiang's political constituents. One of Song Meiling's older sisters, Song 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, was apparent. Another sister married H. H. Kong (Kong Xiangxi), a graduate of Yale University, who served Sun Yat-sen with distinction as fundraiser, entrepreneur, public administrator, and diplomatic negotiator. Her brother, T.V. Soong, as the Minister of Finance of the Guomindang government in Guangzhou, had successfully funded the initial financial needs of the first phase of the Northern Expedition.

The fact that Chiang had already had three serial partners or 'wives', two of whom had born him children, did not prevent the Song family from accepting him as a suitor. Although the law of the Chinese Republic banned polygamy, multiple wives were not uncommon among wealthy merchants and powerful militarists. Song Meiling, who became Madame Chiang Kai-shek in December 1927, after 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 acknowledging Song as his only wife.

Chiang's temporary withdrawal from China's political scene enabled the opposing Guomindang factions to merge. Most of the Guomindang leaders in Wuhan 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, refused to 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 fourth plenary meeting of the second session at Nanjing. His new brother-in-law, T.V. Song, became the Minister of Finance in January of the same year. By a mixture of coercion and financial dexterity, Song was able to provide funds amounting to 1.5 million yuan every five days, as needed to revive the Northern Expedition.

Since Wu Peifu had been severely wounded, the target this time was to dislodge Zhang Zuolin from Beijing. 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 a China united under the Guomindang. After heavy fighting, Chiang's troops entered Jinan in Shandong in March 1928. From there Chiang's forces joined Feng's at Tianjin to cut off Zhang's retreat by rail through the Shanhai pass, back to the Northeast. Within easy reach by rail from Tianjin, Beijing was 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 3 May the Japanese troops clashed fiercely with Chiang's, and by 11 May 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.

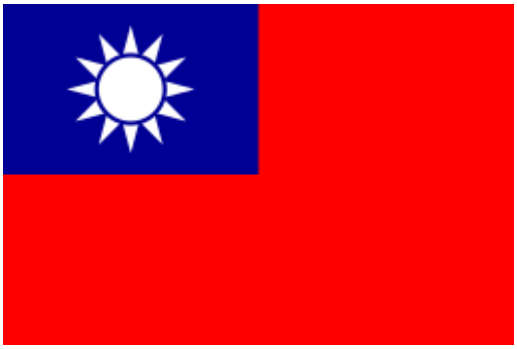
To avoid a military contest at Tianjin, a major treaty port with substantial international settlements and business interests, the Japanese pressed Zhang Zuolin to return to Manchuria peacefully, which he did for lack of a better option. The Japanese also informed Zhang that they would not allow the Northern Expeditionary forces to enter Manchuria. Zhang left Beijing in a luxury railcar on 3 June, after ordering a general retreat of his forces. On the morning of 4 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 had 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 marked the completion of the Northern Expedition. Since Chiang's Nanjing 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, then advancing to party 'tutelage', in preparation for full democracy as the final stage.

The National government that was formally proclaimed on 10 October 1928 quickly moved to consolidate itself. During the same month, the Guomindang passed a set of regulations on party tutelage and on the organization of the national government. Soon afterwards, the government in Nanjing was reorganized with

Chiang appointed as the 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. During 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. In 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 (today commonly known as the flag of Taiwan), 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.



The Nationalist flag (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 10 Novenber 2023 from

https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fupload.wikimedia.org%2Fwikipedia%2Fcommons%2Fthumb%2F7%2F72%2FFlag_of_the_Republic_of_China.svg%2F1200px-Flag_of_the_Republic_of_China.svg.png&tbnid=SqF6u0AzEGphQM&vet=12ahUKEwiFoYLKybqCAxUApokEHRR6D14QMygAegQIARA0..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FNationalist_government&docid=rSZDVzqMOtb6M&w=1200&h=800&q=the%20chinese%20nationalist%20flag&ved=2ahUKEwiFoYLKybqCAxUApokEHRR6D14QMygAegQIARA0)

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