

CHAPTER 8: REVOLUTIONARY CHINA AND COMMUNISM

1. COMMUNISM SINKS ITS FANGS INTO A CHINA IN TURMOIL

Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance

Sun Yat-sen is often described as the founding father of modern China. In 1894, when Sun was 28 and living in Hawaii, he harbored hopes of overthrowing the Qing dynasty and ridding China of foreign influences. To that end he established the Revive China Society, a secret organization. In the following year, when China was defeated in the 1st Sino-Japanese War, Sun felt that his country was ripe for revolution. He laid plans for an uprising in Guangzhou; when they ended in failure, he sought refuge in Japan.

The defeat of Qing China in the war was a turning point for Chinese intellectuals, as it forced them to do some soul-searching. They asked themselves why the Japanese were so strong, eventually arriving at the painful realization that the Japanese victory could be traced to modernization achieved through the Meiji Renovation. The Self-Strengthening Movement, devised to modernize China, was informed by the example set by the Japanese. The movement's activities gained influence throughout China after the war with Japan. At the center of this revolutionary tide was the Society for Preserving China (Baoguoahui), at the helm of which were reformers Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. A revolutionary movement modeled after the Meiji Renovation under the auspices of Emperor Guangxu arose on June 11, 1898. However, due to the coup d'état mounted by Dowager Empress Cixi, the emperor's efforts ended in failure on September 21 after only 100 days (the Hundred Days' Reform). Kang and Liang fled to Japan.

When the Boxer Rebellion erupted in 1900, Sun Yat-sen launched his second insurrection, the Huizhou Uprising. But that too failed because of poor planning and an insufficiency of weapons. Afterwards, Sun returned to Japan, but soon headed to Europe and the US. In July 1905, when it was clear that Japan would win the Russo-Japanese War, he went back to Japan. There he succeeded in consolidating the Revive China Society and two other revolutionary organizations. On August 20, 1905 the Tongmenghui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) was established at a gathering in Akasaka, Tokyo. There, several hundred Chinese students (out of a total of 8,000 studying in Japan at the time) hailing from 17 Chinese provinces (only Gansu province was not represented), attended the meeting. Sun Yat-sen was chosen to head the Tongmenghui, with Huang Xing as his deputy. At that time the organization adopted Sun's Three Principles of the People.

All subsequent uprisings coordinated by the Tongmenghui foundered. The Xinhai Revolution began in 1911 with unrest in Sichuan province stemming from an attempt to nationalize China's railroads, followed by an uprising of the revolutionary troops in Wuchang, Hubei province, on October 10. Inspired by the slogan "Destroy the Manchus, Revive the Han," those incidents accelerated the spread of revolutionary fervor through all of China until, within a month's time, more than 10 provinces had declared their independence from the Qing regime.

Chaos after Xinhai Revolution

Qing court officials appealed to Yuan Shikai, then in exile in Henan, to restore order. After observing the situation for some time, Yuan traveled to Beijing and formed a cabinet. With an abundance of financial and military strength, he took control of Beijing. Meanwhile, news of the success of the Wuchang Uprising had reached the ears of Sun Yat-sen, then in the US. Sun returned to China through Europe, arriving at the end of December. On New Year's Day in 1912, he assumed the office of provisional president of China in Nanjing. He also declared that January 1, 1912 would mark the establishment of the Republic of China. Not long thereafter, as a result of direct negotiations between Sun and Yuan, the two arrived at a joint decision. Yuan, having agreed that China should now become a republic, would arrange for the abdication of the Qing emperor. In return, Sun would yield the presidency to Yuan, and ensure that preferential treatment be given to the imperial household. As a result of this compromise, Pu Yi, the 12th Qing emperor, who was seven years old at the time, abdicated on February 12. The Qing dynasty, founded as the Jin dynasty in 1616 by Emperor Nurhaci, after a reign lasting 296 years (or 268 years after being renamed the Qing dynasty), had met its end.

Provisional President Yuan Shikai, officiating in Beijing, formed a cabinet and moved the center of government from Nanjing to Beijing. The revolutionaries, led by Song Jiaoren, established the Nationalist Party (GMD) and girded themselves for a parliamentary battle against Yuan. In February 1913 the GMD achieved an overwhelming victory in a general election. But Yuan, making use of his militias, took action to suppress the GMD, his first step being to have Song Jiaoren, its de facto leader, assassinated in April. The first parliamentary session was convened that same month, but Yuan took it upon himself to borrow the huge amount of £25 million from the five-nation China Consortium without first obtaining Parliament's approval. Now there was enmity between Yuan and Parliament, and Yuan began using his military strength to destroy the GMD. The GMD raised an army in southern China against Yuan (the Second Revolution), but it was too weak to prevail. Sun and Kang fled to Japan, and fellow revolutionary Wang Jingwei to France. The GMD was thrown into disarray, and many of its members decamped to Japan, where they regrouped. In July 1914 Sun Yat-sen established the Chinese Revolutionary Party, and launched another campaign to combat Yuan.

By 1915 it was obvious that Yuan was now scheming to form an imperial government with himself as emperor. The revolutionaries again raised an army to combat Yuan in Yunnan, and its momentum soon swept China south of the Yangzi River (the Third Revolution). Even power-hungry Yuan was forced to announce the postponement of his ascension to the imperial throne. In June 1916 his turbulent life ended in agony.

Still, the situation in Beijing did not improve one iota, even after Yuan's death. National law and Parliament might as well not have existed. In July 1917 Gen. Zhang Xun, a monarchist, embarked on a campaign to restore the Qing dynasty, but the drama ended after only 12 days. Such was the political climate when Sun Yat-sen and other revolutionaries gathered in Guangdong. In August 1917 an extraordinary session of Parliament was held, at which a military government was approved and Sun was elected grand marshal. The First Guangdong government, operating under the banner "Protect the Constitution," had been established.

At this point China was clearly split in half with two governments, one in the north and one in the south. But foreign powers continued to keep their diplomatic agencies in Beijing, and did not recognize the southern government. Moreover, the southern government, like its Beijing counterpart, was plagued by covert conflicts between warlords and factions. Such was the Republic of China after the Xinhai Revolution. It was so different from Japan, where sovereign power under Emperor Meiji had been restored, and a modern nation had been built, replacing a feudal system that had endured for 300 years. But in China, *revolution* was just an empty word. Because the “new” China, where chaos reigned and private battles between warlords raged, was a breeding ground for subversion, it would soon become the ideal cradle of communism.

Establishment of Comintern

The bizarre nature of the Soviet government that emerged in the wake of the Russian Revolution was revealed by its primary mission, i.e., the spread of communism through the destruction of other nations’ governments. This is the main reason why Japan and other nations viewed Soviet Russia as a threat. The revolution first spread to Germany. One month after the Armistice of 11 November 1918 was signed, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was formed from the Spartacus Group, a left-wing organization. In January 1919 the group staged an uprising, but the communist revolution plan was stymied when its leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were murdered.

However, the year 1918 saw communist parties form in many nations. In March 1919 a founding congress, held in Moscow, was attended by communist party members and left-wing socialists from nations all over the world. It was there that the Communist International (usually shortened to Comintern), also known as the Third International, was established, in accordance with a proposal from Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It was Lenin’s intention to create a worldwide revolutionary organization under Bolshevik leadership whose members would form identical groups using the same strategy and tactics the world over. In forming the Comintern, Lenin was creating an organization identical to the Bolshevik Party (later known by other names, but in essence the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), and operating under the same platform, which was adopted at the Second World Congress in July 1920.

In order to join the Comintern, each nation’s communist party was required to embrace the party platform, which comprised 21 conditions. Particularly noteworthy is the mention of two indispensable essentials: “propaganda and agitation” and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (Condition 1). Also required was the removal from all responsible positions of “reformists and ‘Centrists,’” in other words, anyone opposed to communist strategy and tactics (Condition 2). Additional requirements were combining “legal and illegal work” if legal work alone does not enable communists to accomplish their objectives when preparing for civil war (Condition 3), “persistent and systematic propaganda and agitation in the armed forces” (Condition 4), and “regular and systematic agitation” in the countryside (Condition 5).¹

¹ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works: Volume 31 (April-December 1920)* ed. Julius Katzer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1920), 207-08; <https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.16156/page/n5/mode/2up>.

Once created, the Comintern was formally an international organization to which communist parties of member nations belonged. But total control was in actuality in the hands of the Soviet Communist Party, which considered each nation's communist party as a subdivision of itself through the Comintern. As evidence of that, we have the following:

It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International selflessly to help any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces (Condition 15).²

and

All decisions of the Communist International's congresses and of its Executive Committee are binding on all affiliated parties (Condition 17).³

Consequently, the Soviet Communist Party, armed with two weapons, the Soviet government and the Comintern, two identical organizations, set out to create a communist world.

The Karakhan Manifestos: red-tinged “smile diplomacy”

Having failed to transform Germany into a communist state, the Soviet communists turned their gaze toward the East and zeroed in on China. The Xinhai Revolution seemed to have stalled there, but the May Fourth Movement had, fortuitously, reached its peak. The Soviets decided to engineer a communist revolution in China. The Soviets chose flattery as their bait, specifically the two Karakhan manifestos. Their author was Lev Karakhan, then the Soviet Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs.

Let us examine the first manifesto, dated July 25, 1919; here are some relevant excerpts from the USSR's first attempt at “smile diplomacy” in Asia: a declaration of friendship toward China.

Immediately after [the Workers' and Peasants' Government took power, it] proclaimed that all the secret treaties concluded with Japan, China, and the former Allies were annulled The Soviet Government then proposed to the Chinese Government that they start negotiations to annul the treaty of 1896, the Peking protocol of 1901, and all agreements concluded with Japan between 1907 and 1916

(...)

Now we again address the Chinese people, in order to open their eyes.

The Soviet Government has renounced the conquests made by the Tsarist Government which deprived China of Manchuria and other areas. Let the people living in those areas themselves decide within the frontiers of which State they wish to dwell, and what form of government they wish to establish in their own countries.

² *Ibid.*, 210.

³ *Ibid.*, 211.

The Soviet Government returns to the Chinese people without compensation of any kind the Chinese Eastern Railway, and all mining concessions, forestry, and gold mines which were seized from them by the government of Tsars, that of Kerensky, and the outlaws Horvath, Semenov, Kolchak, the Russian generals, merchants, and capitalists.

The Soviet Government renounces the receipt from China of the 1900 Boxer rebellion indemnity

(...)

If the Chinese people wish, like the Russian people, to become free and to avoid the fate which the Allies prepared for them at Versailles, a fate designed to turn China into a second Korea or a second India, they must understand that their only allies and brothers in the struggle for freedom are the Russian workers and peasants and their Red Army.

The Soviet Government proposes to the Chinese people, in the person of their Government, that they enter right away into official relations with us and send their representatives to meet our army.⁴

This was music to the ears of the Chinese people who, during the 80 years since the 1st Opium War, had been subjected to coercion and encroachment from the Allies. And as fate would have it, China just happened to be experiencing a maelstrom of nationalism in the wake of the May Fourth movement. The cunning sweet nothings whispered by the Soviets were like oil poured onto a fire. They further fanned the flames of nationalism, and boosted pro-Soviet sentiment.

Then, a year later, in 1920, at the Second Congress of the Comintern held in July, after deciding to bolster policies intended to create a communist world, the Soviets blithely released the second version of the Karakhan Manifesto in September, which was handed to the Beijing government.

Its main points are shown below.

- I. The Government of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republics declares as void all the treaties concluded by the former Government of Russia with China, renounces all annexations of Chinese territory, all the concessions in China, and returns to China free of charge, and forever, all that was ravenously taken from her by the Tsar's Government and by the Russian bourgeoisie.

- IV. All citizens of Russia residing in China must abide by all the laws and regulations in force in the territory of the Chinese Republic and shall not enjoy any rights of extraterritoriality whatever; Chinese citizens, residing in Russia, must similarly abide by all the laws and regulations in force on the territory of Russia.

⁴ Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China 1917-1924* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 269-71.

VIII. The Russian and the Chinese Governments agree to conclude a special treaty as for the rules and regulations of exploitation of the Chinese Eastern Railway for the needs of the RSFSR.⁵

Disassembling manifestos

Both Karakhan manifestos were nothing more than sugar-coated poison. For instance, the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway “to the Chinese people without compensation of any kind,” as promised in the 1st Karakhan Manifesto, was retracted and replaced with a reference to the conclusion of a special treaty relating to the railroad “for the needs of the RSFSR,” in the 2nd Karakhan Manifesto. Moreover, when it comes to territorial matters, the main focus of the manifestos, the USSR has yet to return even one square centimeter of the Amur region and what is now known as Maritime province, lands wrested away from China by Tsarist Russia via the Convention of Peking (1858) and the Treaty of Aigun (1860), to China.

The USSR sold the Chinese Eastern Railway to Manzhouguo in 1935. Later, toward the end of World War II, a secret treaty was drawn up among the USSR, the UK and the US at the Yalta Conference concerning entry of the USSR into the war against Japan. It states, in part, that “the Chinese Eastern Railroad and the South Manchurian Railroad which provides an outlet to Dairen shall be jointly operated by the establishment of a joint Soviet-Chinese company it being understood that the preeminent interests of the Soviet Union shall be safeguarded... .”⁶ Here the Soviets are demanding not only the Chinese Eastern Railway, but also the South Manchurian Railway! Furthermore, in the Yalta treaty the USSR also demanded the restoration of its lease on Port Arthur for use as a naval base. If the Allies’ war against Japan had in fact been a just war whose objective had truly been safeguarding the sovereignty of China, then the secret Yalta treaty promising the restoration of Soviet special interests and leaseholds in China rendered the meaning of and justification for the war void. No, it is worse than that. The war against Japan was never motivated by the desire for international justice. The distortion of and inconsistencies in the war’s objectives, like those mentioned above, were laid bare for all to see as the war came to an end.

In any case, the Karakhan manifestos were, pure and simple, deceptive tactics intended to use gestures of friendship to dispel China’s distrust of the Soviets and lay the groundwork for the eventual communization of all of China. The realization that some Chinese leaders, thoughtless intellectuals, and students, accepted and even welcomed, however blindly, those gestures, gravitated toward the USSR and allowed their country to turn communist brings profound, penetrating sorrow to the hearts of all those familiar with China after it became communist, and the history of the Far East.

Soviet efforts to communize China progressed steadily. In July 1921 the 1st National Congress of the CCP was held in the French Concession in Shanghai. In attendance were 13 individuals representing the seven regions of China. At that time party members numbered slightly upwards

⁶ Diane Shaver Clemens, *Yalta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 310.

of 30 persons (60 according to another theory). In fact, the congress was no more than a clandestine gathering of a minority group alienated from the mainstream of Chinese society.

Party representatives included Li Da of Shanghai, Chen Gongbo of Guangdong, Dong Biwu of Wuhan, Mao Zedong of Hunan, and Zhou Fohai representing Chinese students in Japan. Zhang Guotao of Beijing served as moderator. Holding sway over the congress were Henk Sneevliet (more commonly known by Maring, his pseudonym) and Grigori Voitinsky, representatives of the Comintern. It was at that congress that the Chinese Communist Party was formed; it proceeded to join the Comintern.