

## Part II

### Chapter 1

## How China Became a Communist Country

As we have seen the containment doctrine worked well in western Europe. Indeed, after 1945, the Soviet Union did not take over any country where it did not already have troops. Soviet attempts to detach Berlin from the West, to infiltrate into Greece, to capture control of Italy and France through communist party victories at the polls, all failed. The Marshall Plan put Europe back on its feet economically; the Truman Doctrine gave Greece and Turkey the help they needed to resist Soviet advances; the airlift saved Berlin; and NATO provided a guarantee of American military aid if needed. Americans had good reasons to be proud of their successes in this vitally important area of the globe.

Unfortunately, success among the relatively established industrialized states of Europe could not be duplicated in the shifting, agricultural societies of Asia. Here, and most particularly in China, Americans were confronted with a far more complex situation than in Europe and it is to this part of the globe that our attention now must turn.

### Forty Years of Revolution in China

There is an old saying known to people who knew Chinese history and culture that no revolution could succeed there without the support of its scholars and its peasants. Unfortunately, most Americans who evaluated policy decisions about China knew little about either its history or its culture.

Chinese civilization has a recorded history of some 4,000 years. These can be divided into a series of dynasties or empires, one following another as internal collapse was triggered by strong pressure from the outside. The last dynasty, the Manchu, was well in its death agonies during the latter part of the 19th century. One by one, the nations of the western world, took advantage of this weak Empire. England, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan each carved out spheres of influence for themselves where their nationals could profit from increasing trade, building railroads, and making investments. Chinese leaders, while sometimes eager for the contact with the West, cringed at the humiliation of seeing their



**Mao Zedong**

country carved up by foreigners.\* A revolution in 1911 overthrew the discredited Manchu Dynasty that could no longer protect its people. Dr. Sun Yatsen, the leader of the revolt, preached a doctrine of nationalism, democracy, and socialism. These principles, however, were merely borrowed from the West, and did not represent firm ideals held by the Chinese masses, or even the cultured and educated classes who played vital roles in China's political, economic, and cultural life. Out of Sun Yatsen's revolt, however, two distinct factions arose. The faction attracted to socialism was eventually led by the communist, Mao Zedong. But even this early comm Communism was not related to the Chinese experience; it was a Russian communism, dictated by men trained in the Soviet Union

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\* Americas policy during the early 1900's, was not to get a sphere of influence of its own, but to be given equal access to all of the areas taken by the others. This was called the "Open Door" policy.

who were filled with visions of oppressed factory workers overthrowing their bosses and establishing a government modeled after the USSR. Factory workers, however, comprised far too small a percentage of China's population to form the basis of a mass movement.

The faction encompassing the educated class of China (the 'scholars') included students, doctors, lawyers, and government officials outraged by repeated insults to China by foreign countries. They wanted a China capable of defending itself and determining its own destiny.

During the early 1920's, Chinese socialists and nationalists worked together in an uneasy alliance. But orders came from Moscow for a general strike and the overthrow of the old government. Workers struck, not once or twice, but many times. And each time they were overwhelmed by supporters of the old order, the Nationalists, who looked to Chiang Kai-shek for their leadership. The strikes were brutally suppressed, and the Communists were killed or forced to flee only to regroup, and again be asked to overthrow their employers.

Repeated disastrous failures finally convinced Mao Zedung that the Revolution in China must be based on Chinese conditions rather than Russian fantasies. More out of desperation than design, Mao looked toward the oppressed peasants in China who toiled their lives away on plots of ground barely sufficient to feed their families. Yet, these small farmers had to pay taxes, rents, and other obligations to rich landlords and/or greedy moneylenders. To make payment, they often had to do without nourishment, beg from rich relatives, and even sell their children into slavery.

Mao based his revolution on the idea that just like a fish that needs the ocean for survival, a revolutionary must be sustained by the people. The first task for Mao and his followers, therefore, was to win the support of the Chinese peasants who, like the factory workers in the Marxist Revolution in Russia, 'had nothing to lose but their chains.' Mao Zedung thus gained followers in the small, rural villages by telling farmers that they could till their own soil free from debts and other obligations.

On this simple principle, Mao recruited a guerrilla army, dedicated to redistributing the land and helping the poor farmers. To avoid the mistakes of almost all other armies in China's history, Mao commanded his men to help the people, to treat them with respect, to take nothing from them ("not even needle and thread") without paying for it, and to return all confiscated goods.



**Chiang Kai-shek**

## **The "Long March" and Japan's Invasion**

Chiang Kai-shek began to believe that the greatest threat to his control of China was Mao Zedung. Mao's 'liberated villages' and peasant armies operated in the most distant provinces which were inaccessible with modern transportation. Nevertheless, Chiang resolved to destroy these peasant enclaves and to end this threat to a united China. Chiang's armies pursued Mao's for well over a year across eighteen mountain ranges and twenty-four rivers, for 6,600 miles, (averaging 26 miles a day). By 1935 the exhausted Nationalist troops finally admitted defeat and the Communist survivors (20,000 out of the original 100,000) of this famous "Long March" rested in Yen-an. Here Mao established a state based on his principles, (not Russia's) and developed the philosophy and tactics which later helped him capture all of China. Chiang, meanwhile, was forced to pay attention to another threat to his rule coming from Japan.

Even before Chiang started chasing Communist soldiers across rural China Japanese soldiers invaded Manchuria, the richest and most industrialized province of China. Six years later (in 1937) the

Japanese extended their attack on China itself. Cleverly adopting the posture of Chinese patriots, Mao's Communist band pledged itself to throwing out the invading Japanese. They even forced a reluctant Chiang Kai-shek to publicly commit himself to that goal.\* Between 1937 and 1945 the energies of both factions in the Chinese civil war devoted themselves primarily to defeating Japan. US aid was extended to the Nationalists (known in China as the Kuomintang) before the U.S. officially entered World War II. After Pearl Harbor, Chiang became a valued ally. He was portrayed in the States as a valiant nationalist, struggling to bring democracy to his beleaguered country against impossible odds.

## Two Years of Juggling for Position

After Japan's surrender in 1945, the United States spent over \$2 billion trying to prop up Chiang's decaying Nationalist government. In addition, the US flew Nationalist troops around China, so that they and not the Communists, could take over the territories evacuated by Japanese forces. The U.S. also sold the Nationalists a billion dollars worth of American military supplies at bargain basement prices.

While the U.S. was so clearly involved in helping one partner in the struggle, it also tried to mediate between the two parties of the civil war. The US hoped to establish a coalition government. Chiang, however, would not allow the Communists into the government unless they first disbanded their armies; the Communists refused, unless they could be assured that Chiang would not again try to destroy them.

During these fruitless and frustrating negotiations (1945-47), U.S. advisors practically begged Chiang to reform his government. The US was particularly distressed by the fact that Chiang made no attempts to win the support of the Chinese people, end the rampant corruption in his government, and halt the often-brutal political suppression. While Chiang's policies were costing him political support, a savage, run-away inflation (prices eventually rose to 6,500 times their pre-war levels) forced civil servants into corrupt practices or poverty. Despite American aid and advice, Chiang's government seemed to have lost the will to reform itself and lost the support of China's scholars and its peasants.

Meanwhile, the Communists under Mao Zedung were able to exploit Chiang's weaknesses. By keeping his promises of land to the poor peasants, and continuing his successful political indoctrination program, Mao won the support of the poorest farmers in the countryside. By not alienating the wealthier peasants, Mao was able to extend his political base to include better-educated Chinese. The unflinching respect his army had for the people, whom they treated according to Red army orders, won Mao many followers who had been victimized by the looting, and rampaging Nationalist soldiers.

## The Nationalists Collapse

When fighting between Nationalists and Communist forces broke out once again in 1947, Chiang's troops outnumbered Mao's by three million to one million. In addition, the Nationalists controlled China's cities and major centers of population, about 80 percent of the country. The Communist base of action was the countryside, where they had established 19 'Liberated Areas' containing about 90 million people. However, the Nationalists were unable to capitalize on their advantages in numbers, American-supplied equipment, and trained men. Chiang made the fatal mistake of spreading his troops too thin by simultaneously (and against the wishes of his American advisors) attempting to take Manchuria and North China. In 1948, Chinese Communist troops threw off the guise of guerrilla soldiers and appeared in full battle array with captured Japanese and American tanks and artillery. Discouraged by years of purposeless fighting, lacking a sense of mission, led by corrupt officers who sometimes sold their

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\* \* Chiang Kai-shek had been captured by rebels loyal to Mao, but was released on orders from Moscow, in exchange for a pledge to fight the Japanese. Putting Russia's interests above Mao's, the Kremlin leadership wanted China to divert Japan from an attack on the Soviet Union.

weapons and equipment to the enemy, the Nationalist soldiers either would not or could not fight effectively. In one battle, 100 miles from Nanking 327,000 Nationalist soldiers surrendered to a far smaller number of Communists. Defeat brought more discouragement as well as a brief cessation of American aid. In the spring, summer, and fall of 1949, all of China's great cities, one by one, fell into the hands of Mao's peasant armies. Chiang Kai-shek himself with the broken remnants of his once powerful armies fled and reached the island of Taiwan). Here the Nationalists imposed their rule on the 8,000,000 Taiwanese, while still claiming to be the legitimate government of the country they had lost. Having won the allegiance of the educated, Mao Zedong and his peasant armies were masters of China.

## Reaction in the United States

The American people were ill prepared for Chiang Kai-shek's sudden loss of China. Yet, there had been Foreign Service officers who had sent reports back to Washington advising the United States to begin befriending Communist leaders and abandoning Chiang Kai-shek. But these 'China hands' and other American experts on Asia were generally ignored and then accused of harboring pro-Communist sympathies. Reports from journalists such as Edgar Snow who sent glowing reports of Mao's peasant democracy from Yenan were frequently discounted or disregarded. For years the US Government, the media, and a well-organized 'China lobby' had touted Chiang Kai-shek's heroism and commitment to American principles in a difficult struggle against Japanese aggression and communist subversion. Then, with far too little preparation, the US State Department issued its famous China "White Paper" conveying the Government's official explanation why the US 'lost China.'

*The reason for the failure of the Chinese National Government do not stem from any inadequacy of American aid. The fact was that the decay which our observers had detected in Chungking (the Nationalist's capital) early in the war had fatally sapped the powers of resistance of the Kuomintang. Its leaders have proved incapable of meeting the crisis confronting them, its troops had lost the will to fight, and its government had lost popular support. The Nationalist armies did not have to be defeated; they disintegrated.<sup>21</sup>*

But this explanation did not satisfy Senator Knowland of California, the conservative wing of his Republican Party, and many Americans who were staunchly anti-Communist. Knowland set the tone for the debate over the loss of China, by criticizing the 'White Paper' as 1,054 page whitewash of "a wishful, do nothing policy which has succeeded only in placing Asia in danger of Soviet conquest with its ultimate threat to the peace of the world and our national security. What the Chinese army lacked, more than anything else, were the weapons which the State Department dangerously advised be withheld from its armies."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in George C. Daughan, *The Cold War* (Xerox Publications: Middletown, Connecticut, 1973), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Ronald J. Caridi, *The Korean War and American Politics* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1968), p. 10.

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## Suggested Student Exercises:

1. Identify or define and briefly describe the relation to the chapter of:

- a. scholars and peasants
- b. Manchu Dynasty
- c. Sun Yat-sen
- d. Mao Zedung
- e. communist's appeal
- f. Chiang Kai-shek
- g. Long March
- h. Japanese attack
- i. American assistance
- j. Chunking
- k. China hands
- l. "White Paper"
- m. Senator Knowland

2. Do you think that the US government gave up too easily on Chiang Kai-shek's government as the China lobby believed? Or, do you agree with the China hands that we probably should not have supported a corrupt and ineffective anti-Communist government, even when there is no alternative to communist successes?