

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### NATIONALISM (March, 1927)

ONE of the political anomalies of the past quarter of a century is now about to be canceled in China, and the only question is to what extent this will be done in ink or in blood.

The Boxer movement was started by a superannuated China, profoundly ignorant of the occident. It led to a peace treaty between the conquered land and the offended powers, a treaty which up to now has held China in a peculiar state of dependence on these powers through their control of the customs taxes, the increase of foreign concessions, the fortification of the Legation Quarter in Peking, and the patrolling of the Yangtze River and part of the Peking-Mukden Railroad by foreign warships and contingents of international troops.

It is against this dependence on foreigners that the modern national movement is reacting.

But this Chinese nationalism is not only, not even predominantly, a reaction against foreign "imperialism"; it is above all a purely Chinese revolutionary movement. What is now going on in China is unquestionably the real Chinese revolution, beside which that of 1911-1912 was an outpost skirmish. The decadent Manchu empire was abolished, but the old mandarin régime was only given freer play with the addition of a terrifyingly ignorant, lawless and arbitrary militarism.

#### THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

What is now going on in China is the awakening of a national feeling that includes the great mass of the people, a one-sided and ruthlessly revolutionary, but at least a spontaneous and powerful popular movement, which a later world will undoubtedly come to regard as one of the most notable strands in the tapestry of twentieth-century history.

It is with sad and strange feelings that we look back to the two main figures in the revolution of 1911, Yuan Shih Kai and Sun Yat Sen.

The former was the last really great mandarin, the cynical and coldly overbearing puller of strings in the political play of marionettes, inspired no doubt with an old-time patriotism, but above all enflamed with the ambition to use all the new slogans — revolution, parliament, democracy — for the founding of a new dynasty, that of Yuan. On the whole his effort to restore the empire in 1916 was the last attempt in that direction with any hope of success. In that case he had the tragic distinction of ending the two thousand years of the Chinese empire, at the same time that Sun Yat Sen in all his unpractical futility stood at the door of a new China, whose political structure we can but dimly discern.

Yuan Shih Kai had a unique opportunity of building up a new realm directly from the fragments of the broken Manchu régime, but, blinded by personal ambition, he let this opportunity slip out of his hands. The military princelings, military governors, dictators, grew strong under the few years of his rule, and when he fell and disappeared in the summer

## NATIONALISM

of 1916, the country lay at the mercy of their jealousy and greed for power.

The political decade of 1916-1925 will always stand out as a black page in Chinese history: one Chang, a little abortive emperor-maker, fought against Tuan and was quickly eliminated; Tuan fought against the greater Chang of Mukden; Li came forward twice and each time was dismissed with increasing ignominy; Wu defeated Chang crushingly under the walls of Peking and was then stabbed in the back by Feng. Feng was for a time Chang's uncertain ally and later became his enemy. Chang stretched his arm down toward Shanghai but was soon beaten by Sun, who shone for a time like a rising star but then faded.

No one but the specialist in Chinese political history can sustain his interest in these endless intrigues, treacheries and disputes which for ten years impoverished a peace-loving people and devastated great stretches of blossoming country. It was against this purposeless, vacillating and hopeless militarism that the national movement arose, and the cry of "Down with the soldiery!" resounds as loudly from the students who have left their desks to learn the art of war at recruiting stations as from the peasants of Honan, who formed the "Red Spear Society" to kill every soldier or group of soldiers wherever they could be successfully attacked.

If, then, the national movement is essentially a phenomenon of internal politics, born of a desperate effort to lift the country out of this apparently endless civil war, one may naturally ask why this great

#### THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

popular impulse has taken on such hostility to foreigners.

The answer lies to some degree in the law of least resistance, which in every political calamity impels the masses to seek a remedy by attacking some real or fancied evil that is easily comprehensible and close at hand. All the old slogans — imperialism, one-sided treaties, unjust extra-territorial preferences, etc. — have been utilized by an extremely well-organized propaganda, and in some quarters this has gone as far as old-time superstition, which related among other things that the Catholic nuns collected the hearts of little Chinese children and sold them to foreign countries for a high price as a potent medicine.

On the whole, however, this hatred of foreigners must be attributed to more genuine causes. While the foreign powers have endeavored with all the means at their disposal to preserve the political privileges — control of finances, concessions, extra-territorial rights, etc. — which they have had through treaties at various times; they have since 1901, with a remarkable lack of consistency, tried to put into the hands of the Chinese the means which would allow them to fit themselves to Western standards.

Take, for instance, the matter of military development. At the beginning of the century, the Boxer period, China had just begun to construct an army after the Western pattern, and the Chinese troops were dispersed fairly easily by the international expedition which relieved the legations in Peking. Yet

## NATIONALISM

only a few years passed after the conclusion of the Boxer affair, before the powers competed in teaching the Chinese the art of war, while agents for the military industries of the various countries underbid and intrigued among each other in the effort to supply warships, cannon, rifles and ammunition to a people who, in the old days, put the profession of the soldier in the lowest social rank.

When I came to Peking some months before the outbreak of the World War, the city was thronged with commercial agents and concession sharks of many kinds, and assuredly if the walls of the Hotel Wagons Lits could talk, we should hear some remarkably piquant inside stories of business politics.

The developments in the field of spiritual culture have been somewhat similar. The missionaries were here the trail-breakers, and to the practical Chinaman with his tolerant indifference in religious questions the whole mission propaganda appeared a phenomenon very difficult to grasp, behind which he was inclined to look for hidden influences and purposes. The attack upon missionaries was at least in one case — that of the Germans in Shantung — the starting point for political measures of wide extent. Also the Catholic missionaries often mixed into Chinese law trials on behalf of their proselytes, and the missionary thus became a factor not always to the advantage of the foreigners in the opinion of the Chinese.

Largely in combination with the missions, but quite independently as well, the foreigners in China

#### THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

have set up many institutions of learning: elementary schools, high schools, medical and other special schools. At these schools all sorts of Western education, often mixed with Christian propaganda, are imparted to the Chinese pupils.

The effect of this more or less unselfish work has been to a considerable extent quite different from what its originators have imagined. It seems as if the Christian religion, the Christian training, the Christian dogma had been a little too accessible, too moderate to be fully appreciated by the well-balanced Chinese mind, which asks with surprise, even with some malice, what evil do the foreign devils feel they have committed in China if they have to make all this recompense?

At all events, in the foreign schools in China, in the modern institutions of the Chinese themselves, in Japanese, American and European universities, where thousands of Chinese students are working, a large band of the Chinese youth has obtained a thorough knowledge of the West and its culture, a knowledge which renders modern China far better able to defend herself culturally than was the case in the year of the Boxers, 1900.

It seems as if the powers, and in particular their diplomatic representatives in the East, had not sufficiently calculated on the practical effects of this change in Chinese military, industrial and cultural standards. For twenty years China has been stuffed full of war material, industrial products, education and religion; but politically it has, up to the last

## NATIONALISM

two years, insisted that everything should remain as it was.

It is this inability to see in time the signs of political storm, together with the lack of a constructive liberal policy on the part of the powers, which caused the political typhoon that took the foreigners unprepared at their daily sports, *thés dansants* and cocktail parties. In a following chapter we shall have occasion to go somewhat more thoroughly into the course of events.

A striking trait in the shifting of conditions between the Chinese and the foreigners in China is the lowering of the foreigners' prestige which has come during the last years. In 1917, when Chang Hsun made his farcical attempt at a restoration in Peking and the city lived for a couple of weeks in a state of panic, the houses of the foreigners were safe places of refuge for their Chinese friends. I myself had four Chinese ladies and three gentlemen living with me, and I had besides lent a Swedish flag to a Chinese friend who lived far out in the southwestern part of the city.

It is now supposed to be best for foreigners in times of disturbance not to show their flags but rather to disappear as soon as possible.

It cannot be denied that not only the nationalist movement but the short-sighted policy of the foreigners is responsible for the degradation of our position out in China.

The first blow to the ascendancy of the white race in the East was given during the World War, when

#### THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

the Germans and their confederates were taken out of the united front which, up till then, had been maintained by the whites in the East. That the guards of the German and Austrian legations were disarmed and interned was, after China had taken part with the Allies, in the order of things. But that French colored soldiers plundered German shops in the Legation Quarter the night after the news of the armistice, and that not only the German wholesale merchants and financiers, who might have hurt the business of the Allies in China, but German governesses and artisans were "repatriated", gave rise among the Chinese to many thoughts which were not favorable to the reputation of the whites.

Another foreign element which to a quite devastating degree broke down the prestige of the whites in the East was the White Russian fugitives, who pressed into China by the thousands during the last years of the war and the period immediately following.

I myself had an impressive experience of this invasion during a trip from Honan through Shensi to Lanchow, the capital of the province of Kansu, during May and June, 1923. I had my first encounter with the Russian fugitives a few days after the start in the midst of a driving sand storm between Kuanyintang and Tungkuan, the border fort between Honan and Shensi. Wagon after wagon, loaded with dusty men and with women wound up into bundles, popped out of the dark and vanished into a cloud of dust. Most of the younger men were simple peasant types



## NATIONALISM

with the heavy features of the Russian common folk, probably privates of the White Russian troops whom the Reds had driven into Chinese territory and disarmed. But many of the elder men were of fine aristocratic type, evidently officers or officials.

I had many such meetings during my month's trip, and in especial I remember an evening in a little Chinese village where we spent the night, and where I found a little old Russian woman who was going begging from house to house. She turned to me a finely cut but wizened and wasted countenance, and when I spoke to her at a venture in French, she brightened up and gave me a ringing answer which soon explained that she was the wife of a well-known general and had frequented the salons of St. Petersburg. While sharing my simple supper she related how on tired and swollen feet she had roamed slowly and without hope on her *via dolorosa* to the West.

I have already noted that this invasion of White Russians contained elements of the most varied sort: youths and old folk, proletariat and aristocrat, ignorant peasants and highly educated people of the most contrasting professions. With Russian good nature and cheerfulness they were in the main well prepared to meet their trials, and in the course of the year these fugitives gradually came to rest at one place or another, especially at Shanghai and Tientsin, where the colonies of White Russians are extensive.

Under poor conditions, often near starvation, they work their way up in most cases as honest and

#### THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

law-abiding members of the community where they have found refuge.

But many strange destinies have befallen these emigrant colonies. Many happy and charming Russian girls have been forced to make their living by prostitution, open or secret, and the great Chinese generals have willingly received portions of this easily won booty into their harems. I know of one case where a servant of the Russian consulate sold his wife to a rich Chinese for a quite moderate sum, and I have reason to suppose that the affair was arranged with the good will of the little lady in question.

I have been speaking thus far of the Russian fugitives who, thanks to their enterprise, industry and stalwart courage, have succeeded in supporting themselves by an honest trade or in the worst instances to keep on the picturesque border between the upper and under world. But there is still something left to say of those who declined into beggary or direct crime.

When I returned to Peking last year I read during my first days there of the numerous Russian vagabonds or criminals who peopled the Chinese prisons of Peking and caused the Chinese authorities much trouble. Some days later there came under my eyes a striking example of the desperate criminality to which necessity had driven a number of the Russian emigrants.

A Chinese jeweler in the native city brought his

## NATIONALISM

valuables every evening in a little cart to a place of safe deposit not far from the Wagons Lits Hotel, and every morning he trundled the cart back through Chien Men to the shop. Some Russian adventurers found out about this and planned a most daring *coup*. One morning, when the valuables were loaded on the cart, an automobile drove up with three armed men and a Russian girl as driver. A couple of pistol shots struck terror into the peaceable Chinese, and the chests and blue bundles were tossed into the automobile, which was then driven northward at a furious pace. A Chinese policeman on his beat up at Hou Men somehow got the idea that the speeding car was out on an unlawful errand. He fired his gun, forced the automobile to stop, and so the whole robber gang was caught.

To realize fully the tremendous harm which the White Russian fugitives did to the prestige of the white foreigners in China it is necessary to observe that up to the most recent years — apart from those poor people above all criticism as to respectability, the missionaries — nearly all the foreigners in China had belonged to a well-to-do upper class which, with few exceptions, could uphold before the Chinese a standard of decency and outward honesty. For me, who was accustomed to the idea that a foreigner in China must necessarily behave as a gentleman, it was therefore a terrible shock on my arrival at the Grand Hotel de Peking in the autumn of 1925 to find its gate besieged by two Russians of the lowest type

## THE DRAGON AND THE FOREIGN DEVILS

with coarse features and ragged clothes, whose crude begging was the object of mischievous smiles on the part of the surrounding rickshaw coolies, men with a most keen sense of humor.

It is not only into the women's bower that the Chinese generals have taken Russians into their service, but also into their barracks and on the field of battle. The general governor of Shantung, Chang Tsung Chang, has a brigade of White Russians to which is entrusted the heaviest and most dangerous tasks and which has no hope of mercy if it should fall into the hands of the Red Russian military adviser directing the opposing forces.

One sees everywhere at the railroad stations in Manchuria great flowing-bearded Russians dressed in Chinese police uniforms, poor White Russians who have had no choice but to serve under Chinese masters for pay that would make a Swedish constable laugh a dubious laugh.

Every clear-headed and impartial observer must perceive that this White Russian proletariat has lowered the prestige of foreigners in China in a most fatal manner, and must deplore the short-sightedness which has allowed this evil to take root and grow to be a genuine danger to the white man's cause in the East. For reasons easy to be seen the Soviet Government does not care to do anything for these emigrants, who are in open war against the new Russian régime. But it was incumbent upon the other powers, at a moderate cost with a little well-directed organization, to remove to colonial

#### NATIONALISM

environments in South America, Australia or Africa this stream of unfortunate fugitives which is now filling to the brim the brothels, jails and slums.

This short-sighted inertia has let things go from bad to worse, so that China in 1925 offered a most favorable field for Red Russian propaganda.