

*A History of  
Chinese Civilization*

*Second Edition*

**Jacques Gernet**

Collège de France

translated by J. R. Foster  
and Charles Hartman



10 342648

## Contents

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

Originally published in French as *Le Monde chinois*  
by Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1972  
and © Librairie Armand Colin 1972

First published in English by Cambridge University Press 1982  
as *A History of Chinese Civilization*

English translation © Cambridge University Press 1982  
Reprinted 1982, 1983

First published in paperback 1985  
Second edition, 1996

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Gernet, Jacques.

[Monde chinois. English]

A history of Chinese civilization / Jacques Gernet ; translated by  
J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-49712-4. – ISBN 0-521-49781-7 (pbk.)

I. China—Civilization. I. Title  
DS721.G3913 1996

951-dc20

95-6047  
CIP

ISBN 0-521-49712-4 hard cover  
ISBN 0-521-49781-7 paperback

<b>List of Plates</b>	xvii
<b>List of Maps</b>	xx
<b>List of Tables</b>	xxii
<b>List of Figures</b>	xxiv
<b>Preface to the New Edition</b>	xxv
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	xxvi
<b>Translator's Preface</b>	xxvii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<i>Lands and peoples</i>	3
<i>The Han Chinese</i>	6
<i>Non-Han minorities</i>	12
<i>Modes of life and cultures</i>	13
The sedentary peoples with a highly developed agriculture, 14 • The nomadic livestock-raisers of the steppe zone, 15 • The mountain peoples of the Himalayan complex and its borderlands, 16 • The mixed cultures of South China and South-East Asia, 17 • The sedentary cultures and the traders of the Central Asian oases, 18 • The main routes of the Eurasian continent, 19	
<i>Outline of the historical evolution of the Chinese world</i>	20
Antiquity, 22 • The first unified state, its decline, and the Middle Ages, 23 • The Mandarinal state and its restoration after the Mongol occupation, 24 • The Manchu empire, 25 • Contemporary China, 25	
<i>The general characteristics of Chinese civilization</i>	27
Writing, 32	

The first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by a constant deterioration of the social climate, the many causes of which have hardly yet been analysed. These causes included an imbalance in the state's finances which went back to the end of Ch'ien-lung's reign, a period of mad expenditure; the advance of corruption in the ruling circles and in the government service since the time of Ho-shen, the emperor Ch'ien-lung's favourite; the continuous growth in population up to the middle of the nineteenth century; the over-extension of an empire in which the colonized peoples were numerous and suffered from the stronger and stronger pressure of the colonizers; the unfavourable balance of trade from 1820-25 onwards; and an economic recession that was all the more perceptible in that it followed a period of prosperity and euphoria. About 1850 these various causes of tension and disequilibrium ended in the most serious social explosion that the Chinese world had ever experienced. The T'ai P'ing Rebellion (1851-64) and the series of risings that echoed it and went on until about 1875 constitute the most important fact in the history of the nineteenth century. The shock administered to the ruling classes by this great social and political crisis, the efforts necessary to overcome it, and the considerable losses and destruction that accompanied it were at the root of some important changes: the appearance of new political personnel trained in the course of the wars of repression, the weakening of the central government, the decline of the economy. The empire that was restored after the great civil war was no longer the same empire that had existed previously.

It was in this context of decline and crisis that the first intrusions of the Western powers into China took place, from 1840 onwards. But the British attacks of 1840-42, which were bound up with opium smuggling, were only to acquire their true historical significance in retrospect: they were the first manifestation of a policy of colonialist intervention, the nature and aims of which changed as the industrial power of the Western nations developed. The civil war, the strain of reconstruction, and China's difficulties in central Asia facilitated the West's new enterprises in 1857-60 and forced the rulers of China all the more into a policy of compromise since they badly needed foreign capital and engineers to help their military and industrial efforts. But external pressure grew sharper and sharper from 1870 onwards, accentuating the contradictions between those who favoured conciliation and those who favoured intransigence, between modernists in touch with the foreigners and traditionalists ignorant of the realities of the age. At the same time the

backwardness of a China too vast and too highly populated to permit a radical, rapid transformation increased in comparison with the small nations whose industrial development was accelerating. Japan, which had profited from its relative isolation to model itself on the Western countries, crushed the Chinese army and navy in 1894. The Treaty of Shimonoseki opened a new period in the history of the Chinese world—that of its takeover by outsiders.

## Chapter 25

# The Great Recession

### The internal causes of the decline

Worrying signs of a deterioration in the state and in the social equilibrium began to appear at the end of Ch'ien-lung's reign and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first great peasant revolts of the Ch'ing age began in the north-west and in Honan in 1795, the very year in which the aboriginal inhabitants of Hunan and Kweichow rebelled and piracy began again on the coasts of Kwangtung and Fukien. It became clear at the end of the eighteenth century that the glorious reign of Ch'ien-lung had been an age of unconcern, in which the public reserves had been squandered without counting the cost. The court and the state had lived above their means, and corruption, favoured by the centralization of power in the hands of the emperor and by the pernicious influence of his favourite, Ho-shen, had known no bounds from 1775 onwards. The government, deluded by false reports, was badly informed of the situation in the provinces and of the real progress of the military campaigns. While the first Ch'ing emperors had been particularly economical (K'ang-hsi, so it is said, spent no more on the court in thirty-six years than the last Ming sovereigns spent in one year), the expenses of the Manchu aristocracy and the court rose beyond measure in the second half of Ch'ien-lung's reign. Distant wars, the difficulties encountered in suppressing the revolts by aborigines and Moslems, and the emperor's largesses completed the process of exhausting the treasury in the last few years of the eighteenth century. Ch'ien-lung's successors, who confined themselves to making slight reductions in court expenditure, did not succeed in restoring the situation. In the reign of Yung-cheng (1723-35), the state's reserves amounted to sixty million *liang*; in 1850, on the eve of the

terrible T'ai P'ing Rebellion, they were only nine million. Nor did Ch'ien-lung's successors succeed in eliminating corruption and weakness in the Manchu armies, the Banners, which at the height of their power had imposed Chinese sovereignty on such a large part of Asia.

The euphoria which seems to have taken hold of China during the major part of the eighteenth century doubtless had harmful effects in the long run. It looks as if it caused a sort of lethargy in the political field, where it allowed the paternalist authoritarianism of the Manchu power to grow more rigid, as well as in the social and economic domain. But there was an even more serious side to the situation: everything suggests that the political and administrative system, the techniques of production and the commercial practices which had corresponded to the needs of a less extensive and less highly populated empire had become inadequate in an empire which controlled vast territories and whose population seems to have more than doubled in a century. The demographic upsurge which in the eighteenth century had provoked such a remarkable expansion seems to have produced the reverse effect on China's economy in the first half of the nineteenth century. The economy ran out of steam while the population continued to increase rapidly. According to the census figures, the population of China increased by 100 million between 1802 and 1834, the date at which the finance ministry announced that the empire had over 400 million inhabitants. Such a rise is inconceivable. Nevertheless the census figures reflect a reality—the increasingly serious overpopulation of many Chinese provinces.

It was a difficult situation, aggravated by the deterioration in the state and the continual increase in the population, that Ch'ien-lung bequeathed to his successors Chia-ch'ing (1796-1820) and Tao-kuang (1821-50), whose two reigns covered the first half of the nineteenth century. The peasant revolts inspired by the White Lotus sect (*Pai-lien chiao*) were not repressed until 1803. And there was to be a resurgence of this movement a few years later: new troubles broke out in the lower Yellow River valley, in Honan, in Hopei and in Shantung from 1811 onwards. The insurgents, who belonged to the Society of the Celestial Order (*T'ien-li-chiao*), a reincarnation of the White Lotus, found accomplices at court among high officials dissatisfied with Chia-ch'ing's policy of austerity and used to living in the grand style under Ch'ien-lung. A plot organized in liaison with the rebels came into the open at Peking in 1813, but collapsed just when the imperial palace was about to be taken by storm. The rebellion in the provinces was crushed a year later.

However, although the *Pai-lien-chiao* rebellions were successfully dealt with, the actual causes of the peasant agitation were not eliminated.

These were the land shortage, which persisted in spite of clearances and the extension of new crops (maize, sweet potato, ground-nut), the increase in fiscal burdens of every sort, the depreciation of the copper coinage in relation to silver, which began to become rarer since imports of the American metal had declined, the fall in ground-rents tied up with the rapid rise in the price of land, the concentration of land in the hands of a few rich landowners (especially in the south), and the accompanying transformation of small farmers into agricultural labourers. All these factors led to permanent tension in the countryside.

Peasant agitation continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, although it did not provoke any insurrections as serious as those which north-western China had experienced in the years between 1796 and 1804. Revolts are recorded in almost all the provinces, including—for the first time—those of South China. One of the gravest occurred in 1832-33 in the mountainous region on the border between Hunan and Kwangsi. The atmosphere favoured the spread of brigandage and the development of secret societies, which were like religious confraternities, their members being bound by oath and regarding each other as close relations. It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that the secret society known as the Triad (*San-ho-hui* or *T'ien-ti-hui*) and its numerous ramifications took root in South China.

Meanwhile control of the aboriginal peoples of the south and of the territories with a Moslem majority in the west of Sinkiang continued to remain precarious and difficult. The Tibetans of Kokonor rebelled against the Sino-Manchu administration in 1807, and the Yao of Kweichow in 1833. The Moslems of western Sinkiang, led by a Kwadja Turk called Jehangir, seceded in 1825, and the oases of Kashgar and Yarkand were not recaptured until 1828, after a three-year campaign.

The unfavourable balance in foreign trade caused by the imports of opium was to add to the difficulties of an empire already threatened by so many weaknesses and hampered by divisions in the ruling circles.

### Smuggling and piracy

The import of finished products into countries deprived of industries and in process of being colonized marked a turning point in the history of the subjection to the rich nations of the lands which today form the Third World. But this turning point occurred only at the end of the nineteenth century, with the development of mass production. About 1800 the East India Company, which in 1786 had obtained a monopoly in trade with Canton, imported a small quantity of cotton goods and some Yorkshire

Table 20. Imports of opium into China during the nineteenth century

Years	Number of cases
1729	200
1790	400 +
1817-1819	4,228 (average)
	Start of the policy of importing
1820	4,244 (about 5,000?)
1821	5,959
1823	9,035
1826-1828	12,851 (average)
1829	16,257
1830	19,956
c.1836	30,000 (roughly)
1838	40,000 (at least)
c.1850	68,000
1873	96,000
1893	Imports begin to decline because of the rise in prices
1917	Imports stop completely; opium is produced in China itself in sufficient quantities to cover all needs

woollens into China. But the English cloth which found takers in India did not sell well in China, for the Chinese cotton industry was well developed and sufficed for all the country's needs. It was threatened only at the very end of the nineteenth century by massive imports of American cotton goods. Thus it was not from the sale of finished products that the British company drew most of its profits, but from the smuggling of a drug, the high value of which in relation to its small volume made the voyage to China—still an adventurous business—a highly profitable operation.

*The deficit on the balance of trade*

Opium, which was not cultivated on a large scale in China until the beginning of the twentieth century, had been known there since the end of the Ming period. Described by Li Shih-chen at the end of the sixteenth century in his famous treatise on pharmacology, under a transcription of the Arabic word *afyun*, it was imported into Fukien in the seventeenth century by the Portuguese. Imports, which had reached about two hundred cases a year by the beginning of the following century, were officially forbidden in 1729. This veto was extended to the whole empire in 1731. But opium growing made progress from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, after the occupation of India by the British. The East India Company acquired its first territorial rights in Bengal in 1757. It extended them to Bihar in 1765. In 1773 it gained possession of the monopoly in smuggling opium into China and developed the cultivation of the poppy, first in Bengal, then later in central India. By 1810 four to five thousand cases of opium (each containing 65 kilograms of the drug) were being imported every year into Canton, and imports were to increase rapidly in spite of all the vetoes issued by the Chinese government. Such vetoes were issued in 1796, 1813, 1814, 1839, and 1859.

It was in 1816 that the East India Company, whose monopoly soon had to compete with free trade (the company was to be wound up in 1833), took the decision to develop this lucrative trade systematically. Imports of opium from the British possessions in India (first from Bengal, then from Malwa), and to a much lesser extent from Turkey, were to continue to grow rapidly from about 1820 onwards and throughout the course of the nineteenth century. For more than sixty years the sale of this drug was to form the principal source of revenue for the British Indian empire in its relations with China. It was thanks to opium that British trade with China avoided falling into deficit during this period.

There is no doubt that there was a sudden increase in imports in the years preceding the 'Opium War' and this explains the agitation of the Chinese authorities and of the Peking government. The fact is that, apart from the physical and intellectual ravages caused by the use of the drug in its devotees, who were usually minor local officials, employees of the *ya-men*, opium smuggling had serious moral, political, and economic consequences. In Kwangtung, on the eve of the incidents of the Opium War (1839-42), it had created an inextricable situation which could only be clarified by draconian measures, owing to the network of collusion which had been woven at every level between boatmen, pirates engaged in smuggling, carriers, pedlars, government employees, and civil servants

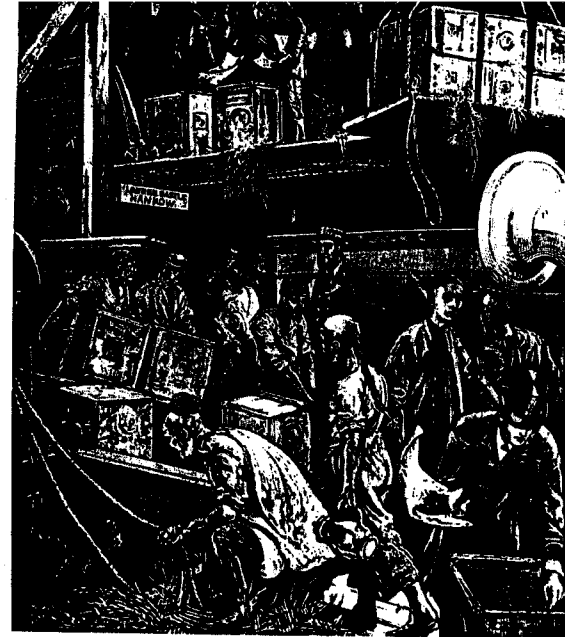


Plate 61. Breaking bulk on a tea ship in London docks, from a nineteenth-century engraving

Plate 62. Opium smokers, nineteenth-century China, from an original photograph



of every grade. It extended and aggravated corruption. Moreover—and this is doubtless what finally induced the central government to react—this smuggling was undermining the Chinese economy, which was already weakened by the wars of the end of the eighteenth century and by demographic pressure. It was the imports of opium which between 1820 and 1825 caused the sudden imbalance in foreign trade. Hitherto favourable to China, from that time onwards the balance of payments showed a deficit.

The sale of opium in China could no longer be counterbalanced by the purchase of Chinese products, even though exports of the latter had continued to expand since the end of the eighteenth century. The principal product exported was tea, in which there had been a substantial trade in the interior of Asia since the Sung and Yüan periods. The spread of tea-drinking in Europe from about 1730 explains the continual growth in exports (especially from 1760–70 onwards), which rose from 12,700 tonnes a year about 1720 to 360,000 tonnes a year around 1830. This substantial commercial trend had repercussions in China: the tea plantations were extended, mainly in Kwangtung, Kiangsi, and Anhwei, but also in Fukien, Chekiang, Kiangsu, and Hunan, and the industry became more highly organized. Other products occupied a smaller place in exports to Europe, but made no less clear progress: purchases of silks rose from 1200 piculs round about 1750 to 6400 about 1830, and purchases of the fine cotton cloth known in Europe as 'nankeen' rose from 338,000 pieces in 1785–91 to 1,415,000 pieces in 1814–20.

However, this expansion of Chinese trade did not suffice to eliminate the deficit caused by opium smuggling.

Between 1800 and 1820 ten million *liang* of silver had entered China. Between 1831 and 1833 ten million *liang* left the country. Thanks to the various 'treaties' successively imposed on China, this flight of Chinese silver, which was essentially due to purchases of opium, never stopped throughout the nineteenth century (at the end of the century opium still formed 30 per cent of imports). During the T'ai P'ing War (1851–64), when most of the trade was concentrated in Shanghai, thirty million *liang* left the port of Canton alone. After reforms in the administration of the salt industry from 1832 onwards the budget deficit was reduced, but the growth of the population and the absence of new resources ended in a rise in prices and general impoverishment. The state could not help without attempting to prevent the drain on its currency.

#### *The first opium 'war'*

The ruling circles were aware both of the danger and of the difficulties implicit in a policy of systematic prohibition; hence the apparent indeci-

sion of the central government and the disagreement about the measures to be taken. Three tendencies came to the surface in Peking. Some advisers were in favour of radical measures of prohibition, others preached a sort of legalization of opium imports, and yet others, taking the view that legal restrictions could lead to evils worse than the original one, thought that the absence of any regulations would deprive the clandestine trade in opium of its main interest. In 1836, when imports were increasing rapidly, Hsü Nai-chi suggested that, to stop the flight of money out of China and to increase the state's revenues, a heavy tax should be imposed on imports of opium and foreigners should be obliged to buy Chinese products (silks, cotton goods, tea, porcelain) in return. However, it was the champions of total prohibition who triumphed three years later in the person of Lin Tse-hsü (1785–1850), perhaps because the danger was becoming more pressing. Despatched to Canton in 1839, Lin Tse-hsü caused 20,000 cases of opium to be seized and ordered the British merchants to decamp without delay. In the explosive atmosphere produced by these extreme measures the British responded with acts of piracy at the mouth of the Chu-chiang (the Pearl River) and then on the coast of Chekiang, where they occupied Ting-hai, a big island in the Chusan archipelago; further north, they threatened the port of Tientsin. But China did not give way. The British attacks were resumed in 1841 after the arrival of reinforcements: the foreigners again attacked the forts of Chu-chiang, occupied afresh Hsia-men (Amoy), Ning-po, and Ting-hai, and threatened Hangchow and the lower Yangtze valley, the British fleet sailing up river as far as Nanking. To put a stop to all this, the Chinese government agreed to open negotiations; the result was the famous Treaty of Nanking of 1842, the effects of which were to be much more serious in the long run than the Chinese negotiators had probably foreseen. From their point of view the British attacks obviously fell into the historical context of acts of piracy committed by foreign peoples and of incursions by nomads wanting markets to be opened at the gates to China. The attacks of the Japanese pirates and those of Coxinga had threatened the coastal provinces of the lower Yangtze much more seriously than the British attacks of 1840–42, and some of the incursions from the steppe had also been much more devastating. The English troops who attacked Canton in 1841 numbered only 2400, and the reinforcements which they received the following year did not exceed a few thousand men. In the last analysis the rights conceded to the aggressors were out of proportion to the risks incurred. The weakness of China at the time of the First Opium War was not so much the obsolete nature of its artillery and the lack of fighting spirit and discipline of the imperial troops as the country's political condition and the social malaise which was soon to erupt in the terrible T'ai P'ing Rebellion. The main causes of

the empire's weakness were probably corruption, the powerlessness of a finicking administration suffering from a superfluity of regulations, excessive centralization combined with lack of coordination, and the enormous distances involved (Canton is over 2000 kilometres from Peking), which resulted in decisions being taken at Peking only after a long delay. If the Ch'ing government ended by capitulating, this was because it was already hesitant and divided about the line to follow even before the British attacks began. The emperor Tao-kuang himself was badly informed, indecisive, and miserly with public money. His envoy to Canton in 1841 agreed on his own responsibility, without waiting for Peking's approval, to the withdrawal of the Chinese troops and the payment of an indemnity of six million silver *liang* to the British. At first convinced by Lin Tse-hsü, the champion of firmness, Tao-kuang subsequently leaned towards a compromise and then decided in 1841 to resume the offensive. The efforts made to resist the foreigners were not negligible: cannon were cast, warships with paddle-wheels were built, in accordance with a tradition that went back to the Sung age, and the ports were blockaded. In addition, peasant militias were formed in 1841 in the Canton area and successfully checked the marauding of the British troops. But the militias, which could have been one of the most effective means of combating foreign incursions in the nineteenth century, were unfavourably regarded by the government and the administration, who feared that they might turn their weapons against the established authorities.

The Treaty of Nanking ended the difficulties for the time being. China ceded to Great Britain the rocky little island of Hong Kong, paid an 'indemnity' of twenty-one million silver dollars and agreed to open to trade; that is, mainly to imports of opium, the ports of Amoy, Shanghai, and Ning-po as well as Canton. She agreed at the same time to suppress the monopoly of the Cohong (Kung-hang), the official association of the merchants of Canton since 1720. This association supervised, in accord with the administration, all trade with foreign countries (South-East Asia, the Indian Ocean, Europe), a considerable part of which was carried in Chinese ships. The additional treaty of 1843 granted the first extra-territorial rights (British subjects were exempted from Chinese jurisdiction) and contained the 'most favoured nation' clause (any advantage acquired by other nations was to be automatically extended to Great Britain). Consular jurisdiction and the creation of the first concessions (*tsu-chieh*) opened the first breaches, which were to enable the Western nations, thanks to the constant progress of their military and economic power, to exert a stronger and stronger hold on China and to limit more and more her independence and sovereignty.

### *Monetary problems*

The conflicts caused by the smuggling of opium and the immediate effects of the imports of the drug, the volume of which never stopped growing from 1820 to the eve of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, should not make us forget the less visible yet extremely profound effects on the Chinese economy and currency.

The history of silver in East Asia has not yet been studied in detail. However, the use of this metal as a means of payment, a use which persisted in China right into the republican era (1912-49), was almost certainly one of the important factors in the deterioration of the Chinese economy from the time when this economy found itself in competition with gold economies on which it became more and more dependent. While the attraction of gold seems to have been one of the decisive causes of the great maritime expansion from Europe to the Indies and America, the dearth of this metal in East Asia, except for Japan, and probably also traditions peculiar to the Chinese world—the predominance in China of the state economy over the mercantile economy—produced the result that gold did not play an important monetary role there. It was because it was relatively abundant and stable in value, unlike paper money, that silver was adopted in China as a means of payment in parallel with copper coins. Its use became general in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and imports from America increased the volume of silver in circulation in Kwangtung and Fukien in the second half of the sixteenth century. About 1564 the Mexican silver dollar or peso, produced in large quantities in Central and South America, appeared in Canton and Foochow, and it remained in use down to our own day.

However, at the same time as the amount of silver increased, thus bearing witness to the constant enrichment of China between the end of the sixteenth century and the end of the eighteenth, the value of silver also continually dropped in comparison with that of gold. While at the end of the sixteenth century silver still retained the high value which it seems to have had all through the period during which Japan had remained the principal exporter of precious metals in East Asia (at that time the relation of the value of gold to that of silver was 1 to 4), from around 1575 it started to depreciate. In 1635 the gold *liang* was already worth ten silver *liang*. The reversal in China's trade balance about 1820-25 coincided with the start of a fresh fall in the value of silver on the international market—a fall hastened by the adoption of the gold standard by the Western powers in the second half of the nineteenth century—just when the Chinese economy began to suffer from Western commercial competition as well as from the war indemnities imposed on



the country by the aggressors. In 1887 the silver *liang* was worth 1.20 American dollars; in 1902 it was worth only .62 of a dollar.

At the same time as China's currency was depreciating on the world market, silver continued to leave the country in large quantities during the nineteenth century. In spite of a fall in the price of opium (a case fetching 1000 to 2000 Mexican dollars before 1821 was worth only 700 to 1000 dollars after 1838), the value of silver, exports of which did not slow down, rose in China to the detriment of copper money:

Before 1820 a <i>liang</i> (c.36g.) of silver was worth about	1000	copper coins
In 1827 it was worth	1300	“ “
In 1838 “	1600	“ “
In 1845 “	2200	or more

This rise in the price of silver did grave harm to the poorest classes who formed the great majority of the Chinese population, for it was they who held most of the copper coins, while their taxes were calculated on the basis of silver money.

From these very brief indications a general and provisional conclusion can be drawn: just as silver-copper bimetalism tended in China itself to aggravate the condition of the least favoured classes, so world gold-silver bimetalism helped to weaken the Chinese economy during the course of the nineteenth century. These monetary mechanisms aggravated the economic recession which characterized the first half of the nineteenth century.

### China and the West

The activities of the West in China are usually presented in a favourable light to sooth the pride of the European countries and of America: the Westerners, so the story goes, led China to emerge from a thousand years of isolation, they awakened her to scientific and industrial civilization and forced her to open her doors to the rest of the world. A routine mentality, the corruption of the mandarins, the tyranny of the emperors, the naïve belief of the Chinese that they were at the centre of the universe, and the superstitions of a wretched populace are compared unfavourably with the spirit of enterprise, the notion of progress, science and technology, freedom, Western universalism, and Christianity.

Moreover, the intrusion of the Western countries into East Asia had, in this part of the world as elsewhere, such grave repercussions that the traditional view of the history of the Far East seems to change radically from the moment that it occurred: for most historians, Chinese as well as Western, the first cannonades of the British sailing ships in the Pearl

River mark the beginning of an entirely new epoch in the history of China. This new period seems to fit all the better into world history in that it becomes an integral part of the history of a West whose evolution from antiquity down to our own day is seen as the keystone of any universal history. By the same token, all the earlier periods in the history of the Chinese world which cannot be related to the history of the West tend to lose their intrinsic interest and significance.

But this is to fail to recognize the solidarity of civilizations, to ignore the world role of China in the past, its relations with central Asia, Iran, India, the Islamic world and South-East Asia, the continual coming and going of merchandise, techniques, and religions across the Eurasian continent, but for which the history of Europe itself would be scarcely comprehensible. It also means dismissing as negligible the specific structures and traditions of the Chinese world. Menacing as the dangers from outside were in the nineteenth century, and profound as the evolution of China may have been, internal problems have never ceased to be preponderant; it is in terms of these structures and these traditions that the Chinese world has changed. This accounts for certain attitudes and certain features that link the China of today to the China of yesterday.

Moreover, by comparing the two civilizations—the Chinese and the Western—globally, by reducing history to their confrontation, we neglect a fundamental element: time. We substitute a stereotype for a series of successive changes which have affected both China and the Western world. In the history of the relations between the Ch'ing empire and the industrialized nations of Europe and America, one must take account not only of the changes that have occurred in China, in society, the economy, the political system, intellectual life, but also of those experienced for their part by the Western countries. Their colonial expansion, the development of their industries, the strengthening of their armies and fleets, the evolution of their foreign policy were all marked by different stages. The England of the last few years of the nineteenth century was already quite different from the England of the First Opium War (1839–42). It is as well to remember that the clearest technical progress in Europe and the United States did not occur until the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1830 only three percent of the vessels of the Western navies were steamships, propelled by paddle-wheels; the steam navy did not really begin to develop until screw propulsion was adopted in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first ships with steel hulls were not built until 1880, ten years after the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), an important date in the colonial expansion of the European nations to the Indies and the Far East. Railways only expanded on a large scale after 1850.

Table 21. Length of railway networks  
(in km)

1840	7,700	1870	210,900
1850	38,700	1880	373,500
1860	108,100	1890	618,400

When the use of coal became general in Europe and America in the middle of the nineteenth century, only ninety million tons of it were being extracted, fifty-six million of them in Great Britain. The total was to rise to 1340 million tons in 1913, at the time when new sources of energy were discovered. Oil and electricity, the internal combustion engine and the electric motor began their career at the beginning of the century.

The invention of the Bessemer converter dates from 1855, that of the Martin furnace from 1864 and that of the Thomas process from 1878. In 1850 the total production of pig-iron was ten million tons; in 1913 it was to reach seventy-eight million.

The cost of English cotton goods fell by 80 percent between 1850 and 1870, thanks to the progress of mechanization. But it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the combination of banking capital and industrial capital made possible the spectacular development of mechanized production; it was then that, through the increasingly rapid progress of technology, the economic and military power of the industrialized nations of Europe and America, soon to be joined by Japan, became really fearsome for China. This had not been the case fifty years earlier. Finally, it is perhaps worth remembering, since we tend to regard China as an essentially rural country, that in 1830 less than twenty percent of the inhabitants of Europe lived in towns and that only about twenty cities had populations of more than 100,000.

The real threat that England posed for the China of the first half of the nineteenth century was not nearly so much a military one as an economic one: the imports of opium helped to undermine the economy of an empire whose finances and political system had continuously deteriorated since the end of the eighteenth century. And that is the essential point, for this internal decline ended in the terrible social explosions and in the insurrections of colonized peoples that were to shake the empire between 1850 and 1878.

What changed the political conditions, the ruling circles, the economy and fiscal system and the intellectual life of China so perceptibly between 1850 and 1870 was not the activities of the Western powers but the great social and political crisis of the T'ai P'ing War. The almost exclusive attention devoted by Western historians to the history of the economic and

military penetration by the nations of Europe and America has falsified the true picture.

The new foreign attacks on China between 1858 and 1860 were to take place in this context of internal crisis, and when the pressure of the industrialized nations grew fiercer at the end of the nineteenth century China had been left so short a breathing-space that she no longer had the time, the means, the peace or the autonomy necessary to recruit her strength and fight effectively against the onrush of imperialism.

It is the combined effect of the evolution of the industrialized nations and of internal developments in the Ch'ing empire, together with the concatenation of events, that account for the march of history and the tragic fate of China.

## Chapter 30

# Political Developments in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

### The epoch of Yüan Shih-k'ai

#### *The disappearance of the old regime*

Much weakened by the defeat of 1894 and by the results of the Boxer adventure, from 1901-3 onwards the Ch'ing government turned to introducing a series of reforms reminiscent of those advocated by K'ang Yu-wei and his friends in 1898. These reforms included the creation of ministries between 1903 and 1906, the publication of the details of the budget from 1908 onwards, the abolition of the traditional competitions (1905) and the reform of the educational system, the creation of provincial assemblies (1909), and the proclamation of a new code of law (1910), the work of the eminent jurist Shen Chia-pen (1837-1910) and inspired by Western legislation. The moribund dynasty was conforming to the fashions of the time. It even displayed some sort of desire for centralization, a whim inspired by its urgent need of money. The Manchu aristocracy was staging a revival and trying to get its hands on the only profitable enterprises in the provinces. Yüan Shih-k'ai, whose power worried Peking, was relieved in 1907 of his post as commander of the armies of the northern zone (*Pei-yang lu-chün*) and appointed minister for foreign affairs. At the same time Chang Chih-tung, governor of the two Hu (Hunan and Hupei), was summoned to the capital and had to leave his middle Yangtze empire. Sheng Hsüan-huai (1849-1916), a corrupt civil servant and a former protégé first of Li Hung-chang, then of Chang

Chih-tung, secured in 1908, thanks to Japanese loans, control of the Chinese Steam Navigation Company and of the Han-yeh-p'ing Company (Han-yang steelworks, iron-mines of Ta-yeh in Hupei and coal-mines at P'ing-hsiang in Kiangsi—the work of Chang Chih-tung). The same Sheng Hsüan-huai reappeared in 1911 at the head of the vast operation of loans from foreign banks and of the purchase and nationalization of the railways which was to provoke a patriotic and regionalist reaction in the provinces and bring about the fall of the dynasty. The old regime was condemned to disappear not so much by its clumsiness and inconsistency as by the economic collapse and by its need to put pressure on the provinces and 'sell China to the foreigners' by borrowing from Western and Japanese banks. The result of this was the growing disaffection of both the old ruling classes and the bourgeoisie of the open ports, of the conservatives and the modernists.

On top of this basic cause of weakness came the secondary effect of anti-Manchu and anti-monarchist currents which had developed in various different circles—the students and intellectuals who had emigrated to Japan, the new Chinese bourgeoisie of South-East Asia, the secret societies of South China and Hunan, the officers of the new armies trained in military schools run by foreign instructors. Japan, taken as a model since 1896 and much admired since her victory over the Russian fleet at Tsushima in 1905, played a very important role in this process of evolution. Various associations in Japan in fact lent the different groups of political refugees a support which was not always disinterested. The most important current of thought among the *émigrés* was the one that favoured a constitutional monarchy on the Japanese model. Its mouthpiece, the erstwhile reformer Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, who wielded a lively pen, had a wide audience among the intellectual élite. Less traditional was the republican tendency represented by Sun Wen (1866-1925), better known in the West by his Cantonese name of Sun Yat-sen. Unlike Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Sun Yat-sen had neither a classical training nor a historical and philosophical turn of mind. He was a man without roots who was to spend most of his life abroad seeking support and subsidies. Born near Macao and brought up in Honolulu, Sun Yat-sen studied medicine in Hong Kong and at first gave the impression of being a run-of-the-mill conspirator connected with the secret societies of Kwangtung. The associations which he founded in 1894 (the *Hsing-chung-hui*, Society for the Rebirth of China) and in 1905 in Tokyo (the *T'ung-meng-hui*, United League) were much more like associations of conspirators than real political parties. Their activities consisted of plots and surprise attacks which were all doomed to failure. The most famous attempt at rebellion was the one which took place in Canton on 27 April 1911 and claimed seventy-two victims (the 'seventy-two martyrs'). Sun Yat-sen's

republican ideology was fairly summary; his three basic themes (the *San-min-chu-i*) put the accent on nationalism, liberal democracy and social justice. But the doctrines were of little importance as compared with action, and Sun Yat-sen's supporters (his friend Huang Hsing, a Hunanese connected with the secret societies of his province and in touch with revolutionary circles in the new armies; Wang Ching-wei, 1883–1944; Hu Han-Min, 1879–1936; and Chang Ping-lin, 1868–1936) naively believed that the salvation of China lay in their hands.

The old regime collapsed without any real contribution from the heterogeneous group of republican revolutionaries except that of a relatively negligible supporting factor. The 'revolution' of 1911 was not a 'bourgeois' revolution, as people have claimed in order to be able to insert it in a scheme of historical evolution furnished by Europe or by the Marxist theory of the five stages of humanity (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism). It was a mere interlude in the breakup of political power in China. The success of the republicans was unexpected: a military revolt at Wu-ch'ang (Hupei) on 10 October 1911 unleashed a vast movement of secession which spread to most provinces. By the beginning of December south, central, and north-west China had broken with Peking, as a result of an alliance between the provincial assemblies and the military. Sun Yat-sen returned from the United States and Great Britain just in time to be elected President of the Republic at Nanking and took office on 1 January 1912. However, at the same time he offered Yüan Shih-k'ai the presidency of the Republic if he was ready to defend the new regime, and this in itself clearly reveals the extreme weakness of this republic without any armed forces or revenues. In the last analysis the Republic was only—with the addition of the various groups of political refugees—a continuation of the former provincial assemblies of gentry rid of the semblance of central authority constituted by the Peking government. In fact, although the gentry were willing that their provinces should be represented in a national parliament, all eyes were turned towards Yüan Shih-k'ai, the only man with a well-trained and well-equipped army and also the only man who could secure some attention from foreign countries. The revolution, which was practically bloodless, was primarily the result of the unavoidable disappearance of a dynasty which could only maintain its position by bleeding the provinces and borrowing from foreign banks.

#### *The dictatorship of Yüan Shih-k'ai*

Recalled by the court in October 1911, Yüan Shih-k'ai profited from the disturbances to secure very wide powers of decision which he employed in bargaining with the extremely weak Nanking government. Two days

after the abdication of P'u-i (the emperor Hsüan-t'ung, aged six), on 14 February 1912, these negotiations succeeded: Yüan Shih-k'ai replaced Sun Yat-sen at the head of the Republic and the government was transferred to Peking. The abolition of the parliamentary institutions and the dictatorship of Yüan Shih-k'ai, which were to follow, were the inevitable result of the forces in play. The republican coalition which triumphed in South China and the Yangtze basin lacked in fact not only military support and finance, but also cohesion. It consisted of the provincial gentry, who belonged to the old ruling classes now in process of disappearing, of army officers converted to the new ideas, the republican intellectuals, and the constitutional monarchists who had decided to support the Republic. The already very extensive powers of Yüan Shih-k'ai grew even stronger as the months went by. On 22 March 1913 Sung Chia-jen, organizer of the Kuo-min-tang, the new nationalist, republican party, and a convinced defender of parliamentary institutions, was assassinated at Shanghai station. A few months later Huang Hsing and Sun Yat-sen were forced to return to Japan.

On 10 January 1914 Yüan Shih-k'ai dissolved the parliament. In May a constitution giving him practically full powers was proclaimed. On 1 January 1916 he re-established the monarchy for his own purposes. Obviously there was no question of a return to the old regime, for its institutions had disappeared for ever with the changes in Chinese society. Moreover regionalist tendencies and foreign pressure—mainly from Japan—were still as strong as ever, and this military dictatorship was just as weak and just as much threatened as the moribund dynasty of the years 1901–11. In July and August 1913 seven provincial governors of south and central China had rebelled against Yüan Shih-k'ai's efforts to extend his hold on the provinces. Supported by the little group of champions of parliamentary democracy disappointed by Yüan Shih-k'ai's authoritarian methods, this attempt at secession is known in the history books as the 'Second Revolution'. The men installed in the central provinces by Yüan Shih-k'ai when order was restored—Feng Kuo-chang at Nanking, Tuan Ch'í-jui at An-ch'ing (in Anhwei), Li Chun at Nan-ch'ang—were not slow to demonstrate in turn their own desire to be independent of their protector. Conditions tended all the more to favour a crumbling of authority in that Yüan Shih-k'ai was subject to pressure from Japan and, induced to yield to this pressure, *ipso facto* alienated a large part of public opinion. On the outbreak of the First World War Japan seized the railway lines, military bases, and territories which Germany had held until then in Shantung. In January 1915 the Japanese embassy in Peking presented Yüan Shih-k'ai with a list of twenty-one demands which aimed at making China into a Japanese protectorate. Yüan Shih-k'ai was obliged to recognize as a *fait accompli* the Japanese

hold on Mongolia, Manchuria, and Shantung. He ceded to Japan the only Chinese industrial enterprise of any importance, the Han-yeh-p'ing Company, together with the blast furnaces of Han-yang and the iron and coal-mines of Ta-yeh and P'ing-hsiang.

By the beginning of 1916, six months before his death, the dictator was beginning to encounter resistance from his minions. Tuan Ch'i-jui in North China and Feng Kuo-chang in Nanking were already looking like rivals. T'ang Chi-yao, governor of Yunnan, strengthened by Japanese support, proclaimed his independence, and soon eight provinces in the south and west seceded. It was the beginning of the period of the war-lords, during the course of which ten former officers of the northern armies, protégés of Yüan Shih-k'ai, became independent heads of armies.

#### The period of the war-lords

##### *Internal policy and foreign presence*

Like the moribund dynasty of 1901-11, Yüan Shih-k'ai and his successors of 1916-28 could only keep themselves in power by borrowing from consortiums of foreign banks. Control of the state's regular income (customs duties, duties on salt, profits from the post office) ensured that the banks would get their money back. But these loans could only be granted to the extent that the Chinese political authorities seemed to be reliable in the eyes of foreign nations. It was logical that they should refuse Sun Yat-sen's weak republican government the advances which they granted shortly afterwards to Yüan Shih-k'ai, who was regarded as the 'strong man' of China during the years 1912-16. The biggest loan had been granted in 1913—£25 million sterling, with an initial deduction of £4 million and the repayment of nearly £68 million between 1913 and 1960. The consortium of German, British, French, Japanese, and Russian banks which advanced this sum of £21 million sterling was able in exchange to secure control of the revenue from salt and of capital deposited in Chinese banks. It was clearly out of the question that such loans should be granted to a political authority which had threatened, as the one headed by Sun Yat-sen in Canton from 1923 to 1925 was to attempt to do, to put an end to the exorbitant privileges acquired in China by foreign nations.

The end of the First World War was to resuscitate the rivalry between the nations which had divided up the old empire into spheres of influence and to favour the political breakup; hence the ascendancy of the men christened 'war-lords' by the Anglo-Saxon press—independent military

governors with their own resources and their own armies—and hence also a complex game of alliances between war-lords and the formation of military cliques hostile to each other. These armies, swollen by peasants without any means of subsistence, resembled modern troops in their equipment (the Western nations were able to unload on China part of the stocks left unused at the end of the First World War) and in their means of transport (railways and steamships), but bands of brigands in their behaviour. Living on the countryside as they moved about, they resorted to pillage and to every kind of exaction. The political weapons of the war-lords were cunning and bargaining, with unexpected changes of external policy, and corruption—and sometimes terror—at home. During the whole period of the war-lords the internal situation of China grew continually worse. There was inflation, the growth of banditry, the disorganization of commerce, and a big increase in the planting of opium—a source of revenue for certain war-lords. The Chinese peasantry was sorely tried in some regions by exploitation, war, and pillage.

The political chess-board changed in accordance with the shifting combinations between the war-lords and their civil allies. Nor was the influence of the foreign powers negligible. In the years following the death of Yüan Shih-k'ai, Manchuria, the zone of Japanese influence, was the fief of Chang Tso-lin (1875-1928), head of the military clique of the Feng-t'ien (Liaoning). Tuan Ch'i-jui (1865-1936) and Hsü Shu-cheng (1880-1925) were dominant in central China and Fukien, again with the help of Japan, from whom Tuan Ch'i-jui obtained considerable assistance in 1918 (the Nishihara loans). This was the group known as the Anfu clique (Anhui-Fukien). The Yangtze valley, the British zone, was held by the clique known as the Chih-li group (Ts'ao K'un, 1862-1938, and Wu P'ei-fu, 1872-1939). But Great Britain also kept an eye on South China, where the political situation could have an effect on the activities of Hong Kong. As for France, which had not abandoned its dream of penetrating the South-East, it supported T'ang Chi-yao (1882-1927), Japan's former client, in Yunnan.

In July 1920 the Anfu clique was defeated by the Feng-t'ien and Chih-li groups. In the winter of 1921-22 the Washington Conference, by calling a halt to Japanese expansion in East Asia, produced a new distribution of the political forces and an armed conflict between Chang Tso-lin, the representative of Japanese interests, and Wu P'ei-fu, the client of Great Britain. However, we cannot follow in detail these incessant changes in an extremely unstable situation, complicated by the rivalries between foreign nations and the pressure of their interests. The essential fact to grasp is the general relationship connecting Chinese political life in the first half of the twentieth century with the rivalries between foreign nations and the pressure of their economic, political, and military interests.

*From the efforts of Sun Yat-sen  
to the triumph of Chiang Kai-shek*

It is clear that in these conditions the patriotic movements in the towns, the student demonstrations, the strikes by industrial workers and dockers, and the boycotts of foreign products could have no perceptible or lasting effects. For this reason the efforts of those who dreamed of saving China from chaos were doomed to failure, since these men were forced to seek abroad support which could not be disinterested and at home the always temporary alliance of the war-lords. This explains why the efforts of Sun Yat-sen came to nothing.

Obliged to go into exile again in Japan in August 1913, Sun Yat-sen returned to Shanghai during the summer of 1916, after the death of Yüan Shih-k'ai. In July of the following year, nursing the hope of winning over the military leaders of South China, he landed in Canton, but, soon disappointed, set out again in 1918 for Shanghai. On 4 May 1919 the schools, the intelligentsia and a large part of the bourgeoisie became extremely roused when they learnt of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which gave to Japan all the rights and territories acquired in China by Germany. At that time Japan seemed to the Western powers to be their best ally against the Bolshevik regime. This movement, which started at Peking university, spread to all the big cities. It was followed by a boycott of Japanese products and by strikes by the seamen, the railwaymen, the workers in the cotton mills and so on. In December 1920 Sun Yat-sen tried to take advantage of the events which had occurred two months earlier in South China, where a new military leader, Ch'en Chiung-ming (1875-1933) had succeeded in evicting from Canton the Kiangsi clique, which until then had been all-powerful there. Entering Canton in triumph, he was elected president of this local republic on 5 May 1921 and tried to inaugurate a regime in conformity with his democratic aspirations. But the hostility of Great Britain and the increasingly open conflict with Ch'en Chiung-ming forced him to leave his native province again; the redistribution of political forces that followed the Washington Conference worked against Sun Yat-sen. Back in Shanghai in June 1922, he awaited a new shift in the situation at Canton, and eventually returned there at the beginning of the following year. At that point he found a new ally abroad—the Soviet Union, which was interested in weakening the position of the Western nations in the Far East. In the summer of 1923 Sun Yat-sen's young brother-in-law, Chiang Chieh-shih (Chiang Kai-shek), a soldier trained in Japan, was sent to Moscow to spend a period of instruction with the Red Army. At the same time a Soviet mission (Borodine, a political adviser, and Galen, a military adviser) arrived in Canton. In January 1924 the Nationalist

party (the Kuo-min-tang) was reorganized on the Soviet model and became a centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic, omnipotent party called to extend its control over every part of the state and the army. In May 1924, with the help of Soviet advisers, the Military Academy of Huang-p'u (Whampoa) was created in the suburbs of Canton. It was to furnish the officer corps of a new army, which was gradually to develop and to be placed under the command of Chiang Kai-shek. In October 1924 an unexpected shift in the situation in Peking, where the 'Christian general' Feng Yü-hsiang (1880-1948) had succeeded in installing himself, encouraged Sun Yat-sen to seek once again an understanding with the new master of North China. Sun Yat-sen travelled to Peking to discuss an alliance and died there on 12 March 1925.

The Kuo-min-tang, which succeeded in maintaining its position at Canton thanks to the development of its army—which numbered 85,000 men and 6000 officers trained at the Huang-p'u Academy—finally attempted in July 1926 the expedition to the North (*pei-fa*) of which Sun Yat-sen had so often dreamed. In conjunction with large forces belonging to the war-lords (of the six armies commanded by Chiang Kai-shek, five consisted of reorganized troops of the war-lords; the sixth was formed of the new recruits of the Kuo-min-tang army), the expedition progressed without great difficulty towards the Yangtze valley, with some of the local armies joining it as it advanced. The whole of the lower Yangtze area was occupied in February-March 1927.

It was at this moment that Chiang Kai-shek took advantage of his place at the head of the armies to ensure himself a dominant position *vis-à-vis* the heterogeneous coalition of which the Nationalist government consisted. Sure of the support of the well-to-do Chinese business men of Shanghai, who were linked to foreign interests, he broke with the section of the Kuo-min-tang which had settled at Wu-han, on the middle Yangtze, and on 12 April 1927 crushed amid rivers of blood the popular insurrection which had broken out in Shanghai on the approach of the Kuo-min-tang armies. The foreign nations with interests in China could from then on be assured that there was no risk of revolution in China and were ready to support the new regime which Chiang Kai-shek established at Nanking on 18 April 1927.

#### The Nanking decennium

Chiang Kai-shek's success was partly due to his remarkable aptitude for profiting from circumstances, to a genius for tactics and bargaining which made him the equal of the most skilful war-lords. But the ultimate reasons for his victory were the weakness and disunity of his adversaries

and the natural play of the economic and political forces on which China's fate in fact depended. By procuring through the criminal classes control of the Shanghai police and by crushing pitilessly the rebellion of the great Kiangsu metropolis, the real economic capital of China, Chiang Kai-shek had acquired at one blow the benevolent neutrality of the big foreign companies established in Shanghai and the sympathy of Chinese business circles, which were tired of the conflicts between war-lords and worried about the revolutionary tendencies which had begun to appear within the Kuo-min-tang. The new regime in Nanking soon acquired the support of most property-owners, insofar as it seemed capable of ensuring the order indispensable to the conduct of business. For its own part, the Nanking government was obliged to collaborate with the powers possessing important interests in China; it was forced into this position by its hostility to the revolutionaries and by the bonds which willy-nilly united the Chinese business class with the big foreign companies. Heir to the war-lords, whom it tried to win over or eliminate without entirely succeeding, it also owed much of its strength to the powerful centralized organization established by Soviet advisers during the years 1924-25. The one-party system ensured absolute control of the government, the civil service, the army, and the political police; and it enabled Chiang Kai-shek to keep firm hold of power. Foreign countries showed themselves ready to grant to this strong regime, which they had desired for so long, the means indispensable to its economic equilibrium. Between 1928 and 1931 Chiang Kai-shek's China was to win back some of the rights which the Manchu government had been forced to yield; the number of foreign concessions in the open ports was reduced and the receipts from the customs, the salt tax, and the post office reverted to the Nationalist government. The 'generalissimo' thus had at his disposal regular resources, of which the maritime customs formed nearly half.

Unification made rapid progress. By 1928 the Nationalist armies had occupied Peking, which was demoted from its status of capital and rechristened Pei-p'ing, while the master of the north-eastern provinces, Chang Hsüeh-liang, heir to his father Chang Tso-lin, joined Chiang Kai-shek. In 1930 Chiang Kai-shek had to reassert his authority, which was temporarily shaken in North China by a coalition led by the former war-lord of Shansi, Yen Hsi-shan, and by the 'Christian general', Feng Yü-hsiang.

#### *Foundations and characteristics of the Nationalist regime*

By the beginning of the Nanking period (1927-37) Chiang Kai-shek was thus the most powerful of the military leaders. He had the advantages

over his rivals of a solid political organization (a one-party system based on the Soviet model), of a somewhat better financial foundation, which he strove to consolidate by controlling banking circles, and of the prestige lent to him by the official recognition of all foreign countries. But for that very reason the Nanking regime differed from that of the war-lords; it was much more closely tied than its predecessors had been to the commercial middle class — which it was to exploit to its own advantage — and also much more open, of necessity, to Western influences. Most of its officials and agents had been in contact with foreigners or had been educated abroad. In spite of its own intentions, it was an emanation of the Westernized middle classes of the open ports, and this very fact explains why, in spite of its declared aim of encouraging agriculture, it was to take practically no interest in the tragic fate of the peasantry.

But the Nanking regime also owed its particular colouration to the circumstances of its time; it came into existence at the period when the world was witnessing the upsurge of Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, and Japanese militarism, while the parliamentary democracies were hit by the great American economic depression, and the U.S.S.R. was living under the bureaucratic police system directed by Stalin. Violently hostile to revolutionary movements and a great admirer of strong regimes, Chiang Kai-shek strove to imitate their methods of propaganda and to disseminate a 'Confucianism' modified to suit modern taste. This was the 'New Life Movement' (*Hsin-sheng-huo yün-tung*), a sort of moral order bound up with the cult of Confucius and the exaltation of the founder of the Chinese Republic. A political police, the 'Blue Shirts', was entrusted with the task of hunting down liberals and revolutionaries.

Created by business men linked first to the imperial government and later to Yüan Shih-k'ai's regime and to the governments dominated by the war-lords, the Chinese banks had played a crucial part in financing military expenditure. For that very reason they represented a sort of relatively independent power which had acted in Chiang Kai-shek's favour at the time of his *coup d'état*. At that time they were in a period of rapid growth because of the drainage of capital from the interior to the great economic centre of Shanghai, where bank deposits increased by 245 per cent between 1921 and 1932. The number of banks in the great metropolis had risen from 20 in 1919 to 34 in 1923 and to 67 in 1927. It was to reach the figure of 164 in 1937. But from the moment of its installation in Nanking the Kuo-min-tang insisted on closer and closer collaboration from the banking sector, granting it, in return for the support required to guarantee the government's finances and make good its

deficit, big advantages and wider facilities for speculation. The result was a kind of state capitalism which enabled the Nationalist government to be sure of the support of business circles at all times and to control capitalists who showed signs of acting too independently. The regime's finances were soon dominated by a few families who owned big banks closely tied to the Nanking government. These families were the Sung (T. V. Sung: Sung Tzu-wen, a Harvard graduate and Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law), the K'ungs (H. H. K'ung: K'ung Hsiang-hsi, descendant of a Shansi business family), and the Ch'ens (Ch'en Kuo-fu and his brother Ch'en Li-fu, men from the Kiangsu commercial middle class). In 1934-35 the Kuo-min-tang profited from numerous banking bankruptcies resulting from the massive purchases of silver made by the United States in the winter of 1933-34 to tighten its hold. Thanks to the nationalization of silver proclaimed on 3 November 1935, the Chinese dollar was stabilized, the banknotes issued by the Nationalist government were accepted everywhere and prices stopped rising. Four state banks dominated the money market at that time; their main function was to finance war expenses and the treasury deficit by issues of bonds with interest rates varying between 20 per cent and 40 per cent. The main beneficiaries were high officials in the government.

Even if they suffered by the regime, as was the case mainly with the new bourgeoisie that owned the banks and industrial enterprises, the propertied classes as a whole were satisfied with an order of things that did not question their privileges. In the countryside the Nanking government did not undertake any fundamental reform of the rent or tax system. The impoverished peasantry thus continued to be the victim of what, through a concatenation of causes and effects, might seem like a sort of inevitable curse. The excessive number of mouths to feed, the extremely small plots into which the land was divided (one and one-third hectares per family), its poor yield in spite of desperately hard work, and the burden of taxation ensured that the smallest inequality of wealth became the means of exploitation thanks to usury and rents. Everything helped to keep the majority of the population in abysmal poverty.

*The Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the development of the Red Army*

The main objectives of Chiang Kai-shek were on the one hand the extension and maintenance of his control over the party and over the whole apparatus of the state—the army, the police, the finances—and on the other the foundation of a powerful military force for the new regime. Half the expenditure of the state was devoted to the equipment of the armies and to the struggle against the independent war-lords. However,

other enemies soon appeared. These were the peasant unions, led by dissident Communists, which were formed south of the Yangtze and later on the rural soviets founded in the south of the province of Kiangsi, in the region of Jui-chin. From 1931 to 1934 Chiang Kai-shek was to direct a series of campaigns against the Soviet Republic of Jui-chin. The fifth and last campaign, which enjoyed the benefit of German advisers and foreign loans, made it possible to oust the Communists from the region.

During this period there occurred a crucial event in the history of contemporary China: the invasion and occupation of the north-eastern provinces by Japan in 1931-32. Completely taken up by the struggle against the 'Communist bandits', Chiang Kai-shek accepted the loss of these territories as inevitable; they had long been penetrated by Japanese capital and their war-lords had often had close links with Japan. Chang Hsüeh-liang's adhesion was in fact quite recent. But, above all, the Kuo-min-tang armies, which were in course of formation, could probably not have stood up to a direct confrontation with the well-trained and well-equipped troops of the invaders. A conflict would have been fatal to a regime which was only just beginning to consolidate its position. However, the occupation of these territories larger than France, with a population of nearly forty million, good ports, coal-mines and the densest railway network in the whole of East Asia, was bound to increase Japan's economic strength considerably. It gave her an excellent strategic base for her conquest of China and was to constrain the Nationalist government to temporize and withdraw before the advance of the Japanese invasion of North China.

Because of the threat that it caused to hang over Chiang Kai-shek's government and because of the effects that it was to have on Chinese political life, the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese troops deserves to be regarded as the most important event in this period of Chinese history.

Led by the very logic of things to confirm its choice of a reactionary attitude, the Nationalist regime, by its attacks on liberals and revolutionaries, was to favour the success of the most radical tendencies. For it is noteworthy that the free play of the most diverse political and intellectual ideas, which had characterized the anarchic period of the war-lords, was succeeded from 1928 onwards by a period in which the predominance of the Communists in the political opposition and that of Marxism in intellectual life became more and more marked. The temporizing tactics adopted by the Nationalist government in face of the Japanese invasion, and, the patriotic struggle of the Red Army and the peasant militias, was finally to win over to the Communists a larger and larger majority of its opponents.

The final success of the Communists has led people to attribute to





Plate 74. Mao Tse-tung in the 1930s

Plate 75. Chou En-lai, in Paris, 1920, the year he joined the Chinese Communist Party in exile



Plate 76. Lu Hsun in Shanghai, 1930, the year he founded the League of Left-Wing Writers



Plate 77. Chang Kai-shek, in London, 1942

them retrospectively an importance which they were far from possessing at the time of the party's foundation and during the Canton period, in 1923–26. A small political group founded in 1921 by a few intellectuals concerned to organize and develop working-class action in the open ports, the Communist party would never have triumphed if it had remained faithful to the norms imposed on it by its Soviet advisers and to the distant directives of Moscow, which knew absolutely nothing about the facts of life in China. This first period was dominated by *a priori* concepts and by the fixed idea that there was only one path that could lead to the revolution—the path that Russia had taken. Absolute faith in the revolutionary vocation of the proletariat and profound mistrust of the peasantry were the basis of Communist orthodoxy. Hence the need for a provisional alliance of the Communist party with the Nationalist bourgeoisie of the Kuo-min-tang until the bitter fruits of industrial capitalism ripened in China. This policy had led quite naturally to the crushing of the Communist party and to the massacre of the working-class leaders. It was in infringement of Soviet directives and in contradiction with received orthodoxy that a peasant revolutionary movement was to develop in the rural areas. Instead of the sudden urban rising, in conformity with an old Western tradition, which had secured all the levers of power for the October Revolution, what occurred in China was the long investment of the towns by the countryside.

The principal heads of the peasant unions and of the rural soviets which were formed from 1927 onwards differed little in origin and training from the first leaders of the Chinese Communist party. Ch'en Tu-hsiu (1879–1942), had studied in Japan and France; Li Ta-chao (1888–1927) had been educated first at a military academy run by the northern armies and later in Japan; Chou En-lai (1898?–1976), the son of a minor civil servant, had lived in Japan, France, and Germany; and Chu Te (1886–1976) had been a student in Göttingen and Berlin. The only one who had never left China was Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976), who came from a family of well-to-do peasants in the neighbourhood of Ch'ang-sha, in Hunan, and had lived throughout his youth in his native province. But, far from the artificial atmosphere of the big cities permeated by Western influences, the Communist movement was to link up with the most authentic revolutionary traditions of the Chinese world. Theory was replaced by practice, and reasoning by an intuitive understanding of the close links between the system of exploitation of the countryside and the political ascendancy of the bourgeoisie of the open ports, an ascendancy which was itself indissociable from the hold exerted by foreign capital. To break this vicious circle it was therefore necessary to ensure the triumph over the urban world of the rural world, the victim of the

double pressure of foreign capital and the Chinese bourgeoisie. To arrive at this goal, firm direction and indomitable energy were required, whatever the tactical necessities imposed by circumstances might be; for example, the accent was put on social justice during the years of confrontation (1927–37) with the Nationalist regime, then afterwards on the patriotic struggle against the Japanese invader. The men most suited to leadership had gradually to be formed in the course of the fight. Instruction and indoctrination had to go on tirelessly. Hence—thanks to a typically Chinese aversion for abstractions and theories—the essentially practical character of Communist thinking in China and its apparent weakness in the eyes of Westerners.

#### From the Japanese invasion to the advent of the People's Republic

The launching of the big Japanese invasion from the north-eastern provinces in July 1937 and the bombing without warning of Shanghai in August marked the opening of the last period—the decline of the Nationalist regime and the upsurge of the resistance to Japan.

#### *The Chungking period*

The Kuo-min-tang government withdrew to Hankow at the end of 1937, and then from Hankow to Chungking, in distant Szechwan, beyond the Yangtze gorges, while the Japanese armies occupied all the provinces to the east and north of the Yellow River, the whole of the Yangtze valley up to Lake Tung-t'ing and all the big towns to the east of a line running from Ch'eng-chou to Canton. The invasion and the campaigns that followed it caused panic and exoduses. Between the end of 1938 and the middle of 1939 the population of Chungking, an old provincial city which became the constant target of the Japanese air force, rose from 200,000 to over a million. For the regime the break was a brutal one; it was suddenly deprived of its main sources of revenue, the customs duties and taxes levied in the regions now occupied by Japan. It was cut off from the great economic metropolis of Shanghai, and from the banking and international circles which constituted its political base and its clientele. This withdrawal into the interior of China was to have very important effects on its evolution. Its only resources were the capital repatriated by the Chinese banks and the aid—at first limited—which foreign countries gave it. The main countries involved were—above all—the Soviet Union, which was to ignore the peasant Communists until

their final victory (its aid amounted to 250 million American dollars between 1937 and 1939), the United States, Great Britain, and France. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, on 7 December 1941, was to ensure it substantial support from the United States from that time onwards. Doubtless the American aid of more than two billion dollars which the Nationalist government received during the Second World War—to which must be added two billion more in the years 1945–49—was relatively little in comparison with the fifty billion granted by the United States to the total of nations at war with Germany and her allies, but this quantity of money represented an enormous contribution to an economy as poverty-stricken as that of Nationalist China in the Chungking days. And, while ensuring the survival of the regime, it was to have profoundly corrupting effects on it.

The system displayed its parasitical nature in the development of a huge bureaucracy and an overblown army whose personnel was to rise at one point to five million men. It abandoned itself to the facile solutions of inflation, with the consequence that prices rose more and more rapidly and the Chinese dollar fell in value at an accelerated pace. By 1944 the dollar was worth five hundred times less than on the eve of the Japanese invasion. This monetary collapse, together with the external aid and a bigger American presence than ever, with its bases, its aircraft, its depots, its means of transport, and its radio stations, favoured speculation, the use of influence for private ends, and corruption. Some of the former privileged classes, the lowly officials of the regime, teachers—in a word, all those not enabled by their position to enrich themselves by illicit means—lived in poverty and felt more and more disaffected to the regime.

This disaffection was strengthened by the scant success of the military operations and Chiang Kai-shek's persistent hostility to the Communist partisans fighting the invader. Reduced by the campaigns of encirclement of 1931–34, the soldiers and leaders of the Chinese Soviet Republic of Kiangsi had withdrawn towards the west in October 1934 and had reached northern Shensi across the chains of mountains of western Szechwan. Pursued by the Nationalist armies, forced to find their way through the most inhospitable regions, those who undertook this 'Long March' (*ch'ang-cheng*) of 12,000 kilometres—the great epic of Chinese Communism—were nearly 100,000 when they set out; only seven or eight thousand reached their destination. Those who had escaped very soon made Yen-an the centre of a new soviet base, organizing the struggle against the Japanese and continually recruiting new supporters from the peasantry. Forced in 1936 to combine his efforts with those of the Communists, two years later Chiang Kai-shek launched a big offensive



Plate 78. Supply convoy en route to the forces encircling the Soviet Republic of Jui-chin in Kiangsi (1931–4)



Plate 79. Troops of the People's Liberation Army on the northern front, 1948

against the revolutionary bases in the north-west, and it was only with reluctance and reticence that he accepted the principle of the common front under pressure from the United States during the course of the Second World War.

*The civil war of 1946-1949*

However, the capitulation of Japan in August 1945 suddenly changed the whole basis of the problem and seemed to give new life to Chiang Kai-shek's regime. The reconquest of a considerable part of the territories evacuated by the Japanese armies, the return to Nanking, the official recognition of Nationalist China as one of the victors in the Second World War, invited to participate in international conferences, produced a moment of euphoria. It remained only for the regime, which possessed the support of all countries and large armies very well equipped by the United States, to rid itself once and for all of the 'Communist bandits'. So began in 1946 one of the biggest civil wars in contemporary history.

The two opposing sides were radically different from each other. Big armies of the classical kind which lived on the country like parasites, pillaging the countryside and holding it to ransom, were confronted by the three times smaller peasant militias, who mingled with the anonymous rural masses, waging a war of attrition, raids, and localized operations. The defeat of Japan had been relatively less favourable to them than to the Kuo-min-tang armies, which had extensive transport facilities at their disposal. Even in the north-east, where the Communists had obtained a strong foothold during the clandestine struggle against the Japanese occupying forces, the Nationalist troops had been able to seize control of the main centres at the time when the Soviet armies were withdrawing, after dismantling and sending westward piece by piece the factories of this industrial area. However, the advantages enjoyed by the Nationalists were more apparent than real; their lines of communication were too extended and their armies held only the towns. The regime had not cured itself of its vices. As the fighting went on and the tactical superiority of the partisans—popular in the countryside thanks to their policy of redistributing the land—became clear, it grew more and more demoralized. Thus when the Red armies won their first big victories, almost the whole of public opinion swung over to them. In the middle of 1947 the Red Army took the offensive in the north-east, isolating the Kuo-min-tang forces. In 1948 it captured Loyang and K'ai-feng in Honan, and then Tsinan in Shantung. It then went over to the last phase in its offensive—the deployment of large units, all of whose equipment had been captured in the fighting and part of whose personnel con-

sisted of deserters who had come over from the enemy with weapons and baggage. During the offensive of September–October 1948 the whole of the north-east was conquered and the Nationalists lost 400,000 men, including some of their best troops. The decisive battle took place during the winter of 1948–49, in the area of Hsü-chou (northern Kiangsu). Five hundred and fifty thousand men of the Nationalist armies were put out of action. The Communist troops, who had already entered Peking and Tientsin, were in Shanghai in May, in Canton in October, and in Chungking in November. While the Nationalist government sought refuge in Taiwan, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed on 1 October 1949.

It has been said that national feeling was the great motive force of the history of contemporary China. The truth is that this pronouncement is only true of the last period, that of the struggle against the occupying power; Chinese patriotism remained an impotent aspiration, embodied above all in the young people of the schools and in the intelligentsia, so long as it was deprived of the only means by which it could be expressed—a people's army, independent of foreign interests. The alliance of the peasants and of the soldiers of the Red Army was forged during the course of the struggle against the Japanese invaders, in the territories occupied by Japan. Hence its strength, its success, and the very wide sympathy which the liberation movement encountered. There was a gulf between the political agitation of the first thirty years of the twentieth century and the organization of the peasant soviets of Kiangsu and of the Yen-an period—the gulf that separated the dream from reality, and the disarray of intellectuals in search of theories of salvation amid the jumble of imported ideas from the assurance of fighters who had made contact again with the vast rural population, while retaining control of the situation.

## Chapter 31

# Philosophical and Literary Developments

While in the nineteenth century Western influences had acted in a diffused way, stimulating a sort of Confucian reform and an orthodox reaction, in the first half of the twentieth century the whole history of ideas was dominated by Western contributions. But we must not get the wrong idea about the significance of this phenomenon. This massive intrusion of traditions profoundly alien to those of China was only one aspect of the takeover of the Chinese world. Moreover, it is inseparable from the context of humiliation and disarray which characterized this whole period. The Chinese intelligentsia was the victim of an inferiority complex fed by all the insults inflicted on China—the Treaty of Shimonoseki, the occupation of the 'leased territories', the Boxer protocol, loans secured on the only regular resources of China, the concession of railway lines to foreigners, the granting to Japan of the former German possessions in Shantung by the Paris Peace Conference, the volleys fired by the Concession police on 30 May 1925 in Shanghai (13 dead) and on 23 June of the same year in Canton (52 dead), the occupation of the north-eastern provinces by Japan, and so on; not to speak of the daily humiliations endured by the Chinese in China itself and abroad. The intellectual life of this period was closely bound up with political history.

The intrusion of Western ideas, already perceptible in the field of philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, was aggravated by the disappearance of the literati of the old regime and the development of an intelligentsia educated in Japan, in the United States and Europe, and in China itself, in schools and institutions where the teachers were foreigners. More or less converted to the Western mode of life, liv-

ing in the open ports where a prosperity maintained by the foreign presence reigned, numerous Chinese intellectuals, and with them the young people in the schools, came to think that the salvation of China lay in the total rejection of all her traditions and in the systematic imitation of the West. Hence a feverish thirst for knowledge and a wild ferment of ideas and theories. What arrived from the West, in bulk, as circumstances dictated and in the greatest confusion, was welcomed with enthusiasm. But one cannot absorb a whole intellectual heritage in a few decades; there was certainly rootlessness and infatuation with foreign fashions in China, but the final conclusion must be that the Chinese did their reading through the prism of autochthonous traditions. There was probably hardly any borrowing that could not be regarded as an extension of genuinely Chinese thinking.

Three periods, corresponding to three stages in political history, can be discerned in the intellectual history of the first half of the twentieth century. The first, from about 1900 to the disappearance of the old regime, was characterized by an attempt at adaptation which reflected the more or less radical reformist tendencies which enjoyed their greatest success at that time. The most famous intellectuals of that period still belonged to the old literati who were in process of disappearing. The second period, on the contrary, was one of total disarray and of a tidal wave of Western influences in the China of the open ports. This astonishing intellectual effervescence was gradually to die down during the last period, which corresponded to the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek: romantic individualism and blind imitation of the bourgeois West were to give way before the slow but sure progress of Marxism. Art and literature were to pass into the service of the Revolution.

### *The influence of Japan and the discovery of evolutionary philosophy*

Tendencies to syncretism characterized the political, philosophical, and literary movement of the first ten years of the twentieth century. It was the period which witnessed the triumph of a more or less radical reformism whose supporters and interpreters still belonged to a class that was disappearing—the literati of the old regime. Unable to understand that since Shimonoseki, since the division of China into spheres of influence and since the Boxer affair the tragic fate of China was finally sealed, the best minds thought that the Japanese path—the path of compromise between tradition and modernization—was still possible. This illusion no doubt sprang from the fact that the political institutions had not yet crumbled. There was still an inland China. To the reformers of

every hue and of every origin, Japan, a country close to China both geographically and culturally, then seemed like a model in every field—education, army, institutions, public morality. The Japanese influence was reinforced by the large number of Chinese students who went to Japan to complete their education in the universities, technical schools, and military academies (their number is estimated to have been 15,000 in 1906); by the welcome received by the political *émigrés* from various different Japanese associations and from the Meiji government—as early as 1898 the *Tōa dō bunkai*, the ‘Cultural Association of East Asia’, had been created to further Japanese influence in the Far East; and by the enhanced prestige of Japan after her victory over the Russian army and fleet in 1905. It was usually through Japanese translations that Chinese students made contact at that time with the literary and philosophical works of the West.

The republican revolutionaries and conspirators, who also found encouragement in Japan, represented only a marginal minority, a clandestine current. On the contrary it was the reformers, the advocates of a constitutional monarchy of the Japanese type, who had then the biggest audience among the intellectuals and the young. Their spokesman was Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, who revealed himself as a talented pamphleteer. A refugee in Japan since the failure of the ‘Hundred Days of Reform’ in 1898, he was tirelessly active there, seeking by his articles in the press, his pamphlets, his books, to galvanize his compatriots, analysing the causes of China’s decline, assimilating and adapting to the Chinese tradition the new ideas of his time—evolutionism, liberalism, the spirit of enterprise, the worship of science, and so on. In his view it was a matter of forging a new sort of man, for the evil came from the fact that people had grown accustomed to humiliations. Mildness, submission, the spirit of tolerance, the traditional morality bound up with a type of civilization and a political system that had disappeared and had been overtaken by events had to be replaced by the spirit of competition, of struggle, by nationalism and intransigence—in short, all the qualities displayed by the Western nations and by Japan.

We also find this insistence on the need for a transformation in depth of the public ethos in a contemporary of Liang Ch’i-ch’ao’s, Yen Fu (1853–1921), a Fukienese who, after receiving a classical education, had studied at the school attached to the Foochow Arsenal, where he had learnt English and acquired a technical and scientific background. During a period of training in Great Britain, with the Royal Navy, Yen Fu had discovered the works of Darwin and Spencer. He had also interested himself in British law and administration. On his return to China in the closing years of the nineteenth century he was to become one of the first

translators of the English evolutionary philosophers. His translation of *Evolution and Ethics* (*T’ien-yen-lün*) by T. H. Huxley in 1898 had gained him sudden fame and had been followed by a whole series of other translations between 1900 and 1910—*The Study of Sociology* (*Ch’ün-hsieh ssu-yen*), by H. Spencer, *The Wealth of Nations* (*Yüan-fu*), by Adam Smith, *On Liberty* (*Ch’ün-chi-ch’üan chieh-lun*), by John Stuart Mill, and *L’Esprit des lois* (*Fa-i*), by Montesquieu.

Written in the classical language and in a refined style, full of literary and sometimes obscure allusions, Yen Fu’s translations were accompanied by personal commentaries. They had considerable influence, inculcating the idea that natural selection and the struggle to live were laws which applied not only to the animal kingdom but also to nations. This interest of Yen Fu and his contemporaries in Darwinian evolution and Anglo-Saxon sociology had in fact a political motive behind it; these ideas formed a justification for the dissemination of a new ethos inspired by the West: individualism, liberty, and democracy had gradually to penetrate into Chinese manners and institutions.

It was not a question of copying the West, but of using it as an inspiration, and this intention was perceptible in the very form, which remained traditional. Yen Fu’s translations were written in classical Chinese and interspersed with personal reflections. The first translations of Western literary works were also in the classical language and were really adaptations rather than translations properly so-called. They were the work of a contemporary of Yen Fu’s, another Fukienese by the name of Lin Shu (1852–1924). Suddenly attaining celebrity in the last few years of the nineteenth century, thanks to a translation of Alexandre Dumas’s *Dame aux camélias*, Lin Shu, who did not know any foreign language, was to adapt very freely, on the basis of translations made to him orally, more than one hundred and sixty Western novels by authors as different as Walter Scott, Defoe, Dickens, Cervantes, Ibsen, and Victor Hugo.

This combination of a fresh content with traditional forms, which is characteristic of the work of the two principal translators of the early years of the twentieth century, recurs in Chinese literature proper. More than a thousand novels appeared between 1900 and 1910. All of them were in sympathy with the reform movement, were inspired by national preoccupations, and aimed at political and social criticism. But they remained faithful to the great models of the Chinese novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through their division into episodes, the multiplicity of the characters, and their realism. The most famous are those of the great scholar Liu E (1857–1909)—the *Lao-ts’an yu-chi* (*Account of Master Ts’an’s Journey*) (1902)—of Wu Wo-yao (Wu Chien-chen) (1866–10), who wrote more than thirty novels in the years

1900-10, and of Li Pao-chia (Li Po-yüan) (1867-1906), the author of the famous *Kuan-ch'ang hsien-hsing-chi*, which takes as its target the circles of corrupt officials of that time.

#### *The Western invasion*

The political and intellectual climate changed from 1915-17 onwards, and it was then that the first signs began to appear of the great period of moral confusion, intellectual ferment, and invasion by Western fashions and ideas. The phenomenon was to reach its climax from 1919 onwards. The causes of this change in intellectual life were no doubt many, and we must certainly give due weight to the after-effects of the disappearance of the dynasty and the old lettered classes, to the demonstrations of Japanese imperialism (the occupation of the Shantung territories, the twenty-one demands, the progress of Japan's economic hold on China), to the disappointments caused by the parodies of parliamentary democracy and the dictatorship of Yüan Shih-k'ai, who tried a restoration and sought to revive the cult of Confucius, and to the growth in the number of students educated abroad, especially in the Western countries. But it seems as if there was above all a deep break between the generations at this time. The movement was launched and led by the young people in the schools and by the students who had returned from abroad.

The ever more numerous Chinese who had studied in Japan, Europe, or the United States experienced a deep feeling of shame with regard to their own country and its traditions. In the state of decline into which China had fallen, traditional manners and customs, the literature and arts of the literati—all that remained of the old China—seemed to them like an odious caricature. Any compromise with the past had become impossible; it was necessary to break once for all with all the old Chinese traditions and, in order to lift China out of its state of prostration, to awaken people's consciences and reach the widest possible public.

The first activities of this radical movement, which was to attract the young people in the schools and the new, more or less Westernized intelligentsia of the open ports—the interior of China was hardly involved because of its poverty and isolation—were the foundation of reviews and literary societies. The oldest and most important review was founded at Shanghai in 1915 by Ch'en Tu-hsiu (1880-1942), a man who had held a scholarship in Japan and was to become in 1921 one of the founders of the Chinese Communist party. It bore the significant name of *Hsin-ch'ing-nien* and the French sub-title of *La Nouvelle Jeunesse*. Ch'en Tu-hsiu's first article was an 'Appeal to Youth' that resounded like a declaration of war on the moral traditions of China, which were sys-

tematically compared with the dynamism and spirit of enterprise of the West. Two years later there appeared the 'Suggestions for a Literary Reform' of a young Chinese educated in the United States, one Hu Shih (1891-1962). The article aimed at a radical reform of literary usages and advocated the abandonment of the classical language in fields where its use was traditional, the abolition of clichés and literary allusions, and the use of simple, direct language inspired by the spoken tongue (*pai-hua*). From this time onwards use of the *pai-hua* was to make very rapid progress. Ch'en Tu-hsiu for his part prayed for the development of a revolutionary, living, realistic literature.

The movement of 4 May 1919, launched by the students of Peking when it was announced that the former German possessions in China had been granted to Japan, gave a decisive impulse to the development of the most radical political and literary tendencies. Followed as it was by other demonstrations, by strikes and by boycotts which bore witness to the resentment caused by this fresh infringement of the rights of China, which had entered the war against Germany in 1917, the initiative taken by the Peking students marked the beginning of a period of political agitation aggravated by the repressive measures taken by the governments of the war-lords. Political and literary clubs multiplied, as did more or less ephemeral reviews. Western influences grew more and more perceptible. Translations became more numerous; there were controversies between the holders of opposing philosophical views; and a new kind of novel, based on European models, made its appearance and developed.

This intellectual ferment was in its depths much more turbid and complex than a superficial view of it might lead us to suppose; it cannot be summed up as a sudden patriotic reaction inspired by Western ideas (science, democracy, individualism, nationalism). Arising out of the take-over of the Chinese world, it reflected the rootlessness and maladjustment of a youth and an intelligentsia which felt very deeply the contradictions of which they were themselves the victims.

Quite as much as a desire for action, it was the attempt to escape from a situation without any outlet, it was despair, withdrawal into self, and a morbid romanticism which expressed themselves in philosophical debate and literary works. The diversity of temperaments and educational backgrounds involved—some consisting of ideas inherited from the Chinese tradition, others formed by foreign influences—explain the individual variations and the multiplicity of schools and tendencies.

The very conditions in which this invasion of Western fashions and ideas took place explain why, once the fever had subsided, no very profound traces were to remain. Many of the intellectual currents of the

period 1917-28 were conspicuous for their ephemeral and artificial character. Their success was very often due to certain connections between Chinese and Western traditions. For example, it can be granted that there are certain affinities between the philosophy of Bergson and the 'intuitionism' of Wang Yang-ming, between the Anglo-Saxon theory of art for art's sake and certain attitudes typical of the Chinese literati, between Taoism and Darwinism; and these affinities were underlined by the writers themselves.

As in the first few years of the twentieth century, Anglo-Saxon influences predominated because of the British foothold in China and because of the large number of students educated in the United States. Hu Shih introduced the pragmatist philosophy of his teacher John Dewey (1859-1952), who was himself invited to China in 1919-21. The English neo-realist and logician Bertrand Russell also stayed in China in 1920-21. French and German influences were less noticeable. Ts'ai Yüan-p'ei (1868-1940), who had studied in Berlin and Leipzig, and in 1917 reformed Peking University, translated F. Paulsen's *System der Ethik* and wrote a *History of Chinese Ethics (Chung-kuo lun-li hsüeh-shih)* (1917). His efforts reinforced those of the scholar and historian Wang Kuo-wei, who at the beginning of the century had been one of the first to introduce Chinese readers to Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's 'philosophy of will', with his *Essays on Ching-an (Ching-an wen-chi)* (1905). It should be noted that there was also an anarchist current of thought, which linked up with the egalitarian concepts of the secret societies. It had revealed itself at a very early stage among the Chinese students in Paris with the creation of a review, *Le Siècle nouveau (Hsin-shih-chi)* (1907-8), one of the founders of which was a student of biology at Montpellier, Li Shih-tseng, born in 1882, the translator of Kropotkin. The writer Pa-chin, who came to Paris in 1922, was to be converted himself as a young man to the anarchist movement, adopting as his *nom de plume* the first and last syllables of the names of his favourite writers, Bakunin and Kropotkin.

The unanimity which had marked the start of the movement of 4 May 1919 was succeeded by a period of passionate discussions. Moralists and advocates of a purely scientific conception of society clashed. Criticisms of the mercantile, mechanical civilization of the West made themselves heard as a result of the disrepute into which Europe fell after the First World War. The first ones were formulated by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao after returning from Europe in 1919. They were taken up and carried further by Liang Shu-ming, born in 1893, in a comparative study of the civilizations of the East and the West and of their philosophies (*Tung-hsi wen-hua chi ch'i che-hsüeh*), in which the author sees in the Chinese tradition

of the adaptation of desires to economic and social necessities a superior form of humanism, as compared with the exacerbation of desires which, according to him, characterizes Western civilization, and as compared with the opposite excess which he considers typical of Indian civilization, whose traditions, he says, aim at the annihilation of self and at the elimination of desires. However, these intellectual controversies soon gave way to a more fundamental opposition between revolutionaries and pure academics. By 1928 Hu Shih, whose influence had been so preponderant since 1917, had lost most of his audience. His place was taken by Kuo Mo-jo (born in 1892), one of the first converts to Marxism.

A parallel process of evolution occurred in the field of literature, which was also marked in the years 1917-28 by a proliferation of the most diverse tendencies. The greatest novelist of the period was Lu Hsün (1881-1936), critic, controversialist and translator of Gogol, Plekhanov, Lunacharsky and Jules Verne, as well as of Japanese, Polish, Hungarian, and other writers. But there were also other writers of merit; for example, Yeh Sheng-t'ao (born in 1892), Yü Ta-fu (1896-1945), Mao-tun (born in 1896), Pa-chin (born in 1904), and the woman novelist Ting-ling (born in 1907). The sombre and often melodramatic works of these writers express rebellion or despair.

#### *The development of Marxism*

The discovery which related the oppression suffered by China, a half-colonized country, to the capitalist system that had generated imperialism, took place in the years 1919-20. It was the work of a small group of intellectuals led by Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Li Ta-chao (1888-1927). The key to the special history of the Chinese world since the first attacks of the Opium War was provided by a general interpretation of the history of humanity. The characteristics of the capitalist, imperialist countries—the cult of the individual, religious intolerance, the pursuit of profit for its own sake, free enterprise—were suddenly put in a fresh light, together with the reasons for their conflict with the underlying tendencies of the Chinese world. Numerous affinities probably explain the attraction very quickly exerted in China by Marxism. In its negation of any transcendental reality it seemed to link up with one of the constants in Chinese thinking. The theory of the five stages, which, through the workings of a socio-economic dialectic, lead humanity from primitive communism to the socialism of the future, recalled the eschatological visions of the 'great harmony' (*ta-t'ung*) of the school of Kung-yang, given lustre by K'ang Yu-wei, whose epoch was not so far in the past. It also called to mind certain historical concepts of the



seventeenth-century Chinese philosophers, whose influence had never ceased to make itself felt. The abolition of private property, put into practice by the T'ai P'ing in the middle of the nineteenth century, corresponded to one of the deepest aspirations of the Chinese revolutionary tradition and linked up with certain older 'statist' traditions. Marxism thus seems to be in harmony with certain tendencies of Chinese thought. For its part, communism indicated a possibility of action and furnished the model for a revolutionary organization similar to that of the secret societies of China. The Soviet Union's help seemed to confirm these hopes.

The fact remains that in China communism had to adapt itself to very special conditions—those of a huge rural country, deprived of its economic independence and the victim of terrible exploitation, those of a semi-colonized China where the industrial proletariat was too weak and too wretched to play any decisive role; and those of an armed conflict which was to go on continuously from 1927 until the final victory of 1949—against the Nationalist armies before and after the Japanese invasion, and against the forces of the occupying power. If Chinese communism looks primarily peasant, military, and patriotic, it is thanks to these special conditions.

Right at the start it was necessary to sacrifice the first devotees of the new faith—the men who, convinced of the possibility of action by the workers in the open ports, came up against the coalition of Chinese bourgeoisie and foreign capital and who, on orders from Moscow, had to accept willy-nilly an alliance with their natural enemies. Two years after the execution of Li Ta-chao in 1927 by the war-lord government of Peking, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, already held responsible for the policy imposed on him against his will by the Kremlin, was to be expelled from the party. The urban intellectuals had to make way for the obscure fighters of the rural areas, and daily practice had to be substituted for the theories of orthodox doctrine.

Everything was to favour the Communists from the advent of Chiang Kai-shek onwards—the Kuo-min-tang police's persecution of the liberals, the inertia of the Nationalist government in face of the Japanese invasion, the struggle against the resistance movement embodied by the Communists, and the ever more swiftly advancing corruption and decrepitude of Chiang Kai-shek's regime. As the years went by, more and more Chinese intellectuals were converted to Marxism. Marxist publications multiplied between 1935 and 1945; the authors most in demand were Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Bukharin. Literature shed the influences of the 'bourgeois' West: introspection, doubt, and the romantic exaltation of the individual were no longer fashionable. It tended to become a

weapon in the service of the revolution and was encouraged to take this path by suggestions from Yen-an. For example, in 1942 Mao Tse-tung defined the revolutionary functions of literary and artistic creation and proposed that writers should draw their inspiration, when the opportunity arose, from those aspects of the ancient Chinese traditions which could be adapted to the needs of the present struggle.

#### *Historical sciences and exact sciences*

It is noteworthy that in spite of the tragedies of the age and in spite of the extremely precarious conditions of life Chinese scholars and scientists pursued their researches and their efforts to develop scientific education in China. The vivifying contacts between Chinese and Western traditions and the links established with European and American scientists played some part in the surprising resistance offered by disinterested learning in the midst of chaos and destitution, but it was above all to the patriotism of her scientists and scholars that China was indebted for the preservation of her scientific traditions.

In the field of the historical (history, epigraphy, archaeology) and philological sciences, in which China had shown herself to be particularly advanced and had possessed a solid scientific tradition since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some important discoveries were to give a new impulse to research. These discoveries were the disclosure, from 1899 onwards, of the inscriptions on bone and tortoise-shells dating from the end of the second millennium B.C.; the excavations from 1927 onwards at An-yang in Honan on the site of the last capital of the Yin (or Shang) (fourteenth to eleventh centuries B.C.); the discovery in 1900 of the rich hoard of paper manuscripts of the fifth to tenth centuries A.D. near Tun-huang in western Kansu; the bringing to light from 1906 onwards of the notes on wood and bamboo of the Han age in the regions of Tun-huang and of Chü-yen in western Mongolia (first century B.C. and first century A.D.); and the opening of the Ming and Ch'ing archives (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries) in the Imperial Palace at Peking. All these discoveries, which were to be followed by many others after 1950, contained enough material to modify radically all historical views about the most distant past of the Chinese world, about epigraphy and archaeology, and the history of literature, religion, and art.

The scholars who collaborated in working on these new documents and who strove to find in the extremely rich heritage of Chinese civilization certain neglected traditions which presented analogies with Western traditions (popular literature, the theatre, sophistics, logic, Buddhist metaphysics, etc.) came from every circle of society and belonged to

every political persuasion, but the most eminent among them were connected with the Chekiang school, the heir to the school of critical studies (*k'uo-cheng-hsüeh*) of the eighteenth century. Round about 1900 this school was represented by Yü Yüeh (1821–1907), a historian, man of letters, and specialist in the Chinese philosophers of the fourth and third centuries B.C., whose fame had spread as far as Japan, and by Sun I-jang (1848–1908), one of the first specialists in the inscriptions of the end of the second millennium, a bibliographer in search of Chinese works preserved in Japan, editor of the work of the philosopher Mo-tzu and promoter of modern schools in Chekiang. The last and most famous representative of the school of critical studies in the first half of the twentieth century was Chang Ping-lin (1869–1936). A native of Hangchow, the friend and associate of Sun Yat-sen and Huang Hsing—the three of them were regarded as the 'Three Patriarchs of the Revolution' (*Ko-ming san-tsun*)—he had been the disciple of Yü Yüeh. Briefly attracted by the reforming ideas of K'ang Yu-wei, he soon moved over to the anti-monarchist opposition at the time of his stay in Japan, where he arrived in 1899 and where he made the acquaintance of Sun Yat-sen.

Lo Chen-yü (1866–1940) and Wang Kuo-wei (1877–1927) can be linked with the same Chekiang school. Preoccupied as a young man with questions of agronomy, which he regarded as fundamental, Lo Chen-yü had created in Shanghai, after Shimonoseki, an Association for the Study of the Civilizations of East Asia (*Tong-wen hsüeh-she*), which had practical aims and to which he had invited Japanese professors. After becoming Director of the Institute of Agronomy at Peking in 1909, he left China at the time of the 1911 Revolution and took refuge in Japan from 1912 to 1919. Tutor to the former emperor Hsüan-t'ung, the young P'u-i, at Tientsin from 1925 to 1929, Lo Chen-yü was to accept official posts in the new state of Manchuria created by the Japanese. He was one of the pioneers in the study of the Tun-huang manuscripts, of the inscriptions on bone and shells, and of the archives of the Imperial Palace. Another convinced monarchist, Wang Kuo-wei, had entered the *Tung-wen hsüeh-she* at Shanghai in 1898 and had there learnt Japanese and English. After studying physics in Japan in 1902, he had taught philosophy in the teachers' training colleges of Nan-t'ung and Soochow in Kiangsu, discovering during this period of his life the German philosophers—Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Much affected by the fall of the dynasty in 1911, he took refuge in Japan, like his friend Lo Chen-yü. He then gave up Western philosophy and returned to the tradition of critical studies, publishing works on the history of the theatre in Sung and Yüan times (1915), on the Classics, on the historians and on the inscriptions on bronze of the Chou age. We are also indebted to him for

studies of the Han documents found at Tun-huang and Chü-yen, the An-yang inscriptions and the Tun-huang manuscripts. Another historian who made an important contribution by his historiographical method to the renewal at that time of traditional ideas about the ancient history of China was Ku Chieh-kang (born in 1895), the friend of Chang Ping-lin and Hu Shih.

Less well known but probably still more remarkable was the development of teaching and research in the field of the exact sciences. This was due to the efforts of scientists trained partly in China and partly abroad (mainly in the United States after 1927), who strove to train disciples and to establish schools and laboratories. Thanks to these men Chinese science reached international standards in several departments. Men like Ting Wen-chiang (V. K. Ting, 1887–1936), the eminent geologist who founded the Chinese Geological Society in 1922 and the Chinese Palaeontological Society in 1929 (the year of the discovery of Peking Man), the mathematicians Ch'en Hsing-shen (Shüing-shen Chern, born in 1911) and Chou Wei-liang (Chow Wei-liang, born in 1911), one of the pioneers of algebraic geometry, the biochemist Hsien Wu (1893–1959), and the physicists Yen Chi-tz'u (Ny Tsi-ze, born in 1900) and Wu Ta-yu (born in 1907)—the teacher of Tsung-tao Lee, who won the Nobel prize for physics—made a contribution recognized by scientists all over the world to scientific progress. Some of them, such as the atomic physicist Ch'ien San-ch'iang (born in 1910), a disciple of Frédéric and Irène Joliot-Curie, today play a crucial part in the organization of research and in the military strengthening of the People's Republic of China.