

European law was enforced and the Chinese were regarded as inferiors. This was most notoriously expressed in the sign on the gate of a Shanghai park, 'Dogs and Chinese not allowed'. The degradation that the Chinese felt over these developments was to become the dynamic of the revolutionary movements that developed later in China. The Chinese were bitterly resentful but found themselves incapable of mounting effective resistance. The autocratic but ineffectual imperial government with its centre in Beijing proved powerless to stop Western encroachments. Indeed, successive Qing emperors and governments compromised with the occupying powers in order to maintain imperial authority within China. No longer could the Chinese delude themselves that they were culturally, politically or scientifically self-sufficient. Subjection to the West and also to Japan, which exploited the Chinese predicament to its own advantage, undermined such beliefs.

It is important to stress that China was never colonised in the sense that, for example, British India, French Algeria or the Belgium Congo were. Except in such rare cases as the British in Hong Kong, the Europeans did not directly govern China, which remained in theory a sovereign state. The pattern adopted by the European powers was to establish enclaves within China where their own national law and conventions operated. China was forced to accept what in effect were a series of foreign mini-states within its borders.

The reaction of the Chinese to their humiliation was twofold and contradictory; they developed a love-hate attitude towards the West. On the one hand, they deeply detested what the foreigner was doing to China. On the other, they found it hard to suppress admiration for the obvious military and technological advances made by the West. As a consequence, there developed among many Chinese a driving commitment to re-establish the greatness of China by expelling the 'foreign devils'. The means of achieving this, however, would be to copy and adapt those very Western qualities which had led to the current subjection of the Chinese. Since China had no tradition of participatory politics and since her imperial governments were unable or unwilling to lead resistance, the frustration of the Chinese began to take revolutionary forms. Significantly, China's largest rebellion in the nineteenth century, the Taiping rising of 1854-61, was directed against both the foreigner and the Chinese imperial authorities.

3 The Shape of Chinese History, 1900-49

a) The Last Years of Imperial China, 1900-11

In 1900, the extension of the unequal treaties gave rise to an anti-foreigner movement, known as the Boxer Rising. This revolt against the further loss of Chinese sovereignty was joined by the Manchu government. Although the Boxers were eventually crushed by



The provinces of China with their main towns and cities

an international army raised from the foreign concession areas, the rising had revealed the deep discontent within Chinese society. Moreover, the failure of the Manchus to lead the Boxers to victory had further exposed the ineffectual character of the imperial authorities. This added to the government's increasing difficulty in imposing its will on the nation. Had the personnel of government been of greater ability, trouble might have been lessened, but by the beginning of the twentieth century effective leadership had evaporated. Nominally, authority still lay with the Manchu emperor in Beijing, but such imperial power as remained was exercised by the aged Empress Dowager, Cixi (Tzu-hsi), who sought to keep the financially and morally bankrupt royal house in being by a mixture of collusion with the foreigners, belated economic and political reforms, murder within the court, and brutal repression of dissidents. This could not last. By the time of Cixi's death in 1908, the Manchu Empire had forfeited the loyalty of those Chinese who were eager to regain the lost prestige of their nation.

Of the many revolutionary groups that had developed in China since it was first humbled by the West in the 1840s, the most significant proved to be the republican movement led by Sun Yatsen (Sun Yat-sen). Sun, who had been educated abroad, qualifying as a doctor of medicine, wished to see China adopt progressive Western principles, such as democracy, nationalism and socialism. His party formalised these aims as 'the 3 Principles of the People'. However, so different had the Chinese political tradition been that it is unlikely the Chinese understood or interpreted concepts such as democracy and representative government in a Western sense. Western ideas appealed primarily because they seemed to offer the Chinese a way of recovering their forfeited dignity and strength.

Faced by insurrection and mutiny, the tottering Manchu government appealed to one of its dismissed generals, Yuan Shikai (Yuan Shih-k'ai), to help protect them. Yuan had no love for the court which had formerly humiliated him. While pretending to organise resistance to the growing opposition, he used his new authority to betray his masters by plotting their overthrow. Yet Yuan was in no sense a revolutionary; he was motivated as much by a dislike of republicanism as by his vendetta against the Manchus. He would allow the Manchu house to fall but he had no intention of seeing a republic take its place permanently. His ultimate objective was to resurrect the empire with himself as emperor.

The long-expected revolution against the Manchus duly came in October 1911. A military insurrection at Wuhan proved beyond the power of the imperial government to suppress; four months later the Manchu dynasty formally abdicated. Yuan Shikai then did a deal with Sun Yatsen, outwitting the republican leader into allowing him to take over as president of the Republic which had replaced the imperial system. Using his presidential powers to negotiate foreign loans, Yuan presented himself to the outside world as a

leader who would bring stability to China.

b) The Early Republic, 1912-16

The republicans under Sun Yatsen could do little to stop Yuan at this stage. Their influence was limited to parts of southern China, whereas the centre of government and administration was in the north where Yuan held sway. Moreover, in some respects republicanism was too sophisticated to appeal to the mass of the Chinese. What was wanted was a movement which would represent the practical needs of the people, the great majority of whom were rural peasants.

Such a movement would develop after 1919, but the immediate aftermath of the 1911 revolution was confusion and uncertainty. Shortly before he died in 1916, Yuan proclaimed himself Emperor, but it was an empty gesture. In his brief period of power he had solved none of China's basic political or economic problems. Nonetheless, in spite of Yuan's reactionary policies and the republicans' feeble attempts to create a workable constitution, subsequent events were to prove that China had begun to take its first tentative steps towards 'a revolution against the world to join the world'. It had abandoned its antique imperial system, experimented with the representative principle, resolved to drive out the foreigner, and given hope to all those Chinese who anticipated the restoration of old glories by modern methods.

c) The Era of the Warlords, 1916-27

Yuan's death ushered in the chaotic period of the warlords during which central government operated in name only. Internal disruption and humiliation at the hands of Japan, which shortly before Yuan's demise had forced China to submit to its notorious '21 Demands', created a mood of intense nationalism. This culminated in 1919 in a series of anti-foreigner demonstrations known collectively as the '4 May Movement', May being the month in which China learned that despite its support of the Allies in the 1914-18 war in Europe, its request for the return of its territories formerly occupied by Germany, namely Shandong province and the port of Qingdao (Tsingtao), was to be ignored in the Versailles Settlement.

It was also in 1919 that a number of revolutionaries, enchanted by the example of the Russian Revolution in 1917, embraced Marxism. Two years later, twenty of them met in Shanghai to found the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Largely as a result of the influence of the Comintern (the Moscow-based Communist International) the CCP and Sun Yatsen's Nationalist Party, or Guomindang (GMD), came together in 1922 in the United Front, a revolutionary alliance, pledged to rid China of both the warlords and the foreign imperialists.