

CHAPTER VII

THE ANARCHY OF THE TUCHUNATE

Less than three months after the outbreak of the revolution of 1911, before the country as a whole was awake to the issues involved, the Imperial family in a panic delegated its authority to Marshal Yuan Shih-kai, occupying a middle position between the republicans and the dynasty. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the idol of particularistic South China, who had long labored in behalf of the revolution, returned from Europe to be named Provisional President, but turned that office over to Yuan when the general, in February, 1912, secured the abdication of the Manchus. Characteristically Chinese was the final edict of the dynasty, with great dignity granting the establishment of the Republic and giving Marshal Yuan permission to establish it.

With his inauguration, on March 10, 1912, the revolution seemed to be ended, having run its brief five months' course with little bloodshed or material destruction outside of Hankow. Actually, the period of chaos which still continues was being ushered in. The monarchy had fallen before any other system had been even roughly prepared to replace it. China had literally drifted into a republic because the name sounded good to a handful of enthusiasts. Half a generation after its establishment there is neither President nor Legislative Assembly nor Constitution nor Electorate in China. Were it not for the strange, intangible force

of Chinese public sentiment, which is unquestionably republican and democratic, the title given to the country would be entirely grotesque.

Yuan Shih-kai was a very capable military leader, who under the patronage of the Empress Dowager had worked hard to create a modern, efficient, foreign-trained army to replace the medieval formations so pitifully defeated in the Sino-Japanese war. His value as a civilian executive was much more questionable. From the outset of his presidency, which immediately assumed the characteristics of a dictatorship, Yuan proceeded on the fallacious theory that China can be successfully governed by a military autocrat in Peking. Although the provisional Constitution prepared by the revolutionary National Assembly had strictly limited presidential powers, Yuan's centralization policy was more drastic than that of the Manchu rulers, involving a complete subserviency by the provinces which the South, in particular, was not at all inclined to give. Just because Yuan Shih-kai attempted to wipe out local autonomy as completely as Napoleon did in France, he is regarded by those who put all faith in centralized authority as the greatest man of modern China. For this same reason he is also viewed by many intelligent Chinese as the instigator of present-day militaristic troubles. Most of the war lords who now plague the country with their disreputable campaigns were Yuan's generals, each laboring under the delusion that he is big enough to assume a mantle which was oversized for their old chief.

Yuan Shih-kai's reliance on unification by force, moreover, meant subordination to foreign interests and further pledging of China's resources to secure funds. The evil device of appointing a military as well as a civil governor for each province in order to insure centraliza-

tion was a complete fiasco, for many of these Tuchuns¹ combined selfish ambitions, jealousy of their overlord, and local desire for autonomy to keep tax collections from reaching the national capital. The Japanese seizures in Shantung after the outbreak of war in Europe and Yuan's helplessness in face of the Twenty-one Demands greatly contributed to make him unpopular, particularly in the anti-federal south. Even without his abortive effort to restore the monarchy, with himself as emperor, Yuan Shih-kai would probably have been overthrown had death not stepped in to claim him in June, 1916.

Since that date, hopes entertained at the establishment of the republic have been progressively blighted. From a national viewpoint, the state of political anarchy induced is so complete that there is much justification for utter pessimism regarding the establishment of an effective system of government throughout all China. There remains, of course, the paradoxical feeling that political conditions are now so bad that they must soon take a turn for the better. But real improvement, in all probability, will come through the gradual extension and linking up of reasonably decent local government rather than through the fiat of whatever militarist happens to be in control in Peking.

In a study of such limited scope as this, it would not be possible, and would be unnecessary, to touch on more than a few of the landmarks along the downward path of orderly central government in China. The first of these milestones after Vice-President Li Yuan-hung had automatically become chief executive was the dissolution in June, 1917, of the Chinese Parliament, which had

¹The official designation of a Provincial Military Chief has now been altered to *Tupan*, but the old name sticks. More than a new title is needed to improve the flavor of these replicas of feudal barons.

been reassembled after the death of Yuan Shih-kai. To some extent this step was taken to stifle opposition to entering the war against Germany, into which Chinese leaders were partly pushed by Wilsonian idealism, and in part entered gladly because it promised elimination of the special privileges enjoyed by one of the leading white powers on Chinese soil. But to a greater extent, dissolution of the Parliament sprang from the double realization that the people as a whole were not interested in the device, and that it would be an inconvenient check to the policies of the northern war lords who aimed to perpetuate Yuan Shih-kai's autocratic rule. There were other hand-picked parliaments in Peking during ensuing years and the one dissolved in 1917 was reassembled there in 1922, distinguishing itself thereafter by accepting several million dollars in bribes to elect Tsao Kun to the presidency in the following year. Since that time the central legislative body has gradually faded from the picture of Chinese political life. Military leaders find it better business to avoid bribery and spend the money on building armies with which they can put their nominees in office without any consideration of the parliamentary will.

Collapse of the attempt to institute parliamentary government did not, however, mean that the monarchy could be re-established. An effort to reinstate the Manchu Emperor was made immediately after the dissolution of the Legislature in 1917, but was blocked by Marshal Tuan Chi-jui, outstanding leader of the pro-Japanese Anfu party.¹ This second failure in monarchical restoration confirms other evidence that republicanism, no matter how chaotic in expression, has come

¹So-called because most of its original leaders came from Anhwei and Fukien Provinces. It was always more of a political club than a party, having no central executive and no membership outside those instrumental in national politics.

to stay in China. Neither the new dynasty desired by Yuan Shih-kai, nor the return of the Manchus sought in 1917, aroused more than a passing flicker of popular interest in their favor.

Tuan Chi-jui had been Prime Minister until President Li Yuang-hung's hesitation about declaring war on Germany caused him to resign. After the abortive monarchist attempt, in which the President was said to be implicated, Tuan resumed the Premiership and assumed complete control of government, thus deepening the cleavage with the south, to which the intensive centralization and unification by force policy of the Anfu party was deeply objectionable. As a result Sun Yat-sen, Tang Shao-yi, and Wu Ting-fang, the latter memorable among other things for his brilliant work as Chinese Minister at Washington in 1907, had formed a completely independent republican government at Canton. This government had ample vicissitudes of its own, which need not be examined here, but it is important as the lineal predecessor of the present Russian-influenced régime in Kwangtung Province, and as an example of the strongly separatist tendency in South China which has in recent years been a constant reaction to attempted dictatorship from Peking.

In North China, Tuan Chi-jui, a man of generally acknowledged personal honesty and courage, was able to maintain superficial calm by skilfully placating the various Tuchuns. Finances to run the government were forthcoming out of the series of Japanese loans,¹ nominally contracted on the pretext of enabling China to participate actively in the war with Germany. Public hostility to these borrowings, led by student organizations, coincided with the trend in the south to weaken Anfu power. Then, in 1920, Tuan made the mistake

¹See pp. 5-6.

of supporting a notoriously corrupt subordinate¹ against the wishes of Marshal Wu Pei-fu. This Central China war lord, with the active assistance of Chang Tso-lin, the Tuchun of the Three Eastern Provinces (Manchuria), promptly scattered the Anfu leaders by military force, thus inaugurating the series of civil wars which has lasted almost without interruption down to the present time.

With the upsetting of the uneasy balance maintained in Peking by Tuan Chi-jui, friction soon developed between the two leading war lords, Wu and Chang. In 1922, the Manchurian leader announced his intention of suppressing Wu, but instead was defeated by the latter, ably assisted by Feng Yu-hsiang, the famous "Christian General," then beginning to become prominent as a skilful divisional commander and Tuchun of Shensi Province. Feng remained the military power behind the Peking government, now too nebulous to merit naming its shifting puppet heads, while Chang withdrew to Manchuria and proclaimed its independence. Outer Mongolia, in the meantime, had under Soviet influence broken its nominal allegiance to Peking, and was then, as now, to be regarded as a republic allied with the Russian union rather than as a Chinese province.

While Feng occupied Peking and trained the army which was later to become famous as the Kuominchun, Wu Pei-fu, his superior, sought to consolidate the military position throughout China proper. It was the aim of Marshal Wu, the directing head of the so-called Chihli military party,² to place his patron, General Tsao Kun, in the presidency, and to unify China by force. Through

¹Hsu Shu-tseng, generally known as "Little Hsu." To almost universal relief, he was assassinated near Peking, Dec. 29, 1925.

²The other principal military party is the Fengtien party, headed by Chang Tso-lin. Both names are arbitrary, chosen from Provinces. Chihli Province contains Peking. Fengtien Province contains Mukden.

the parliamentary bribery referred to on page 63 the first objective was achieved. The military unification plan failed like all its predecessors and successors patterned on that line. This in spite of the fact that open discord in South China had resulted in the temporary overthrow of Sun Yat-sen, enabling Chihli influence to be considerably extended south of the Yangtze River.

The story of Wu Pei-fu's collapse in 1924 is important, because it shows how unnatural is the recent *mariage de convenance* between him and Chang Tso-lin, old enemies who have been brought together by a mutual dislike of Feng Yu-hsiang and the encroachments of Soviet Russia which the Christian General has tolerated, if not welcomed. It is hard to see permanence in an alliance based on such negative reasons, and it is quite impossible to see any real patriotism in the anti-Russian attitude of Chang, deeply distrusted throughout China because of his years of cooperation with Japan.

During 1924, an obstacle to Wu's consolidation campaign developed in the possession of the native city of Shanghai, metropolis of Kiangsu Province, by the military governor of Chekiang, who found possession of the mouth of the Yangtze valuable because of the revenue derivable from opium smuggling. In September, 1924, the Tuchun of Kiangsu, supported by Wu, moved to recover Shanghai, and occupied it after a brief campaign. Wu and Chang had been steadily drifting in the direction of war, the former through his enforcement of centralization, the latter by reason of his insistence on Manchurian independence. With unofficial Japanese support, the assistance of Czarist Russian officers, and the aid of a British military adventurer (General Sutton), Chang Tso-lin had built up a huge armament of trench mortars, machine guns, and mobile artillery, supplemented with bombing and scouting airplanes and other thoroughly modern war material. Still smarting



A SOLDIER OF THE KUOMINCHUN

Regarded by foreign military observers as the equal of any Occidental troops in discipline and courage.



THE INTERNATIONAL TRAIN

Not Treaty Clauses, but white paint and a liberal display of flags are relied upon to keep communications open to Peking in wartime.

under his defeat by Wu two years previous, the Manchurian war lord seized the fighting around Shanghai as pretext to move south on Peking. The Chihli leader welcomed the gage of battle, and poured division after division of his troops up to the battle ground at Shanhaikwan, the narrow seacoast pass where the Great Wall of China drops from impassable mountains to the Gulf of Pechihli on the Yellow Sea.

At this crucial moment in the military situation came the famous defection of the Christian general, whose well-trained army of 30,000 men held the line south of Jehol and was regarded by Wu Pei-fu as his left wing. It is overstrung, considering the *sauve qui peut* attitude of all Chinese militarists, to define Feng's action as "treachery" toward Wu Pei-fu. The whole story of what occurred prior to the fateful day of October 23, 1924, has not yet been revealed, but it is certain that Marshal Feng decided, with probably as much sincerity as human beings generally show in times of crisis, that the civil war was following senseless lines certain only to impoverish the country further and strengthen Japanese penetration in Manchuria. So on that day Feng's army ceased to be subordinate to Wu Pei-fu and became the Kuominchun—the "People's National Army" of China, pledged not to individual ambitions but to national welfare, the bulk of it composed not of drafted coolies, but of patriotic volunteers who marched into Peking singing Christian hymns and, strangest anomaly of all in modern Chinese warfare, took nothing for which full payment was not made. A few days later Wu Pei-fu, furious and helpless, but too courageous to follow the customary Chinese practice of flying to a foreign concession in time of trouble, retreated openly to his base outside Hankow and there began to plan for the revenge which he took in the spring of 1926.

The Kuominchun—a modern Chinese counterpart of Cromwell's Ironsides, imbued with an Old Testament religious fervor, disciplined like the Prussian guard, loyal to their commander and loyal to China—remained in power in Peking for eighteen months, from October, 1924, to April, 1926. During that period there was perfect order and safety for foreigners of every nation both in the capital and in adjacent territories controlled by Marshal Feng. Living far outside the Legation Quarter in Peking during January of 1926, I no more hesitated to wander about alone at night than if it had been an American city. With a large sum of money in my pocket, a friend and myself, both of course unarmed, traveled from the Great Wall to Peking in a freight car alone with soldiers of the Kuominchun to experience nothing worse than courteous and friendly interest. Every foreigner in the territory controlled by the Christian General during this period would, if honest, testify to hundreds of evidences of like security. Why, then, was there such assiduous foreign propaganda to spread the downright slander about Feng Yu-hsiang which has been popularized abroad?

The answer is not difficult to find. The Christian General had not been a month in power before he showed that his policy was diametrically different to that of the generality of war lords. His aim was not to weaken China for personal aggrandizement, but to strengthen his country by calling a truce to hostilities. Instead of encouraging his soldiers to have loot and rapine as their chief ambition he sent them from the drill ground to road building and afforestation projects, filling their spare time with lectures on the contemporary history of China and general instruction along adult education lines. The morale built up among the Kuominchun by these methods was truly marvelous. Several times I offered private soldiers in that army gratuities, trivial

yet equivalent to a month of their meagre pay, for services rendered. Always the tips were refused with courteous dignity, even though there was none to oversee the transaction.

This alone, though disconcerting to those who claim that China is sodden with corruption and cannot be regenerated by native effort, would not account for the vicious foreign hostility to Feng Yu-hsiang, in which the English in China took the lead. The real cause for this enmity was Feng's efforts to "deepen the revolution" and thereby forward its original aim of ridding China of the encroachments on her sovereignty. This, coupled with the fact that he was anxious to decentralize rather than strengthen the central government, was the Christian General's unforgivable sin.

The "deepening" of the revolution took several forms, of which the most superficial was the expulsion from the Forbidden City in Peking of Hsuan Tung, last of the Manchu emperors, who by the abdication agreements had been allowed to retain the shadow of monarchical state within the imperial palaces. Plain Henry P'u Yi, as this youth now prefers to be known, took refuge in the foreign concession at Tientsin, where his proverbial "Chinaman's chance" at restoration is somewhat strengthened by the inability of presidents and premiers to retain office. This action by the Christian General, however, aroused little or no popular opposition, in contrast to the disappearance of many of the palace treasures which accompanied it, a stain on Feng's record perhaps comparable with that of the Teapot Dome scandal during the Harding administration.

Of far greater importance was the tacit alliance established by Marshal Feng between the Kuominchun, or People's National Army, and the Kuomintang, or People's National Party, the oldest and perhaps the only effective political organization in China. The Kuomin-

tang, of which we shall have more to say in the next chapter, was in large part the creation of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and its leaders were the effective force behind the revolution. It has two wings, practically uniform in their domestic platform, which stands for Constitutionalism, abolition of the military governor system, suppression of the war lords, decentralization of government, and provincial autonomy. In foreign policy the left wing favors summary abolition of the unequal treaties and close cooperation with Russia, the right wing being more conservative on both these issues. Always strongest in Canton, the Kuomintang has branches throughout all China, and among Chinese abroad, its total membership at the present time being half a million by conservative estimate. A very large proportion of university students, whose active participation in politics has created both interest and resentment abroad, belong to it. The Kuomintang is not communistic, there being a separate numerically negligible party of that flavor, but the orientation of the left wing in recent years has been distinctly pro-Russian. The real word to describe the Kuomintang is "nationalistic." That in itself means "Bolshevistic" to many foreigners in China.

To the impartial observer it will seem perfectly proper, if indeed laudable is not an equally permissible word, that Feng cooperated with the Kuomintang, even to the extent of placarding his barracks with such slogans as the one reading: "The People Subjected to Foreign Imperialism Are No Better than Homeless Dogs." Nor can his relations with Soviet Russia be called discreditable. When he bought munitions from that country, it was primarily because he did not possess well-equipped arsenals like Chang and Wu, and was cut off from other foreign sources of supply open to them.

He did not, like the other war lords, actively interfere with the conduct of civil government in Peking. Though

he imprisoned Tsao Kun, Wu's nominee who had been "elected" President by flagrant corruption, the day after his *coup d'etat*, he maintained Tuan Chi-ju of the Anfu party as Premier and "Provisional Chief Executive." Absolutely unprecedented in Chinese post-revolutionary history is the fact that the first cabinet formed after Feng's seizure of Peking did not contain a single minister nominated by him. Early in 1925, the impossible feat of a Reorganization Conference, which would bring both Sun Yat-sen and Chang Tso-lin to the support of Tuan's government, was attempted; but Dr. Sun, whose closing years had seen a decided drift toward extreme radicalism, died at Peking during its sessions, and Chang Tso-lin was glad of the excuse to withdraw his delegates from a conference which sought disarmament of the warring factions as one of its aims.

The Shanghai shootings of May 30, 1925, naturally strengthened the influence of the Christian General, as the outstanding nationalistic leader, and in December of that year occurred a dramatic episode which, in the opinion of many competent to judge, almost succeeded in stabilizing the politics of China along the lines worked for so arduously by the Kuomintang. General Kuo Sung-ling, one of the Manchurian war lord's chief subordinates, revolted against Chang in behalf of the nationalistic program of the Peking government. Wu Pei-fu, stranded without money or men in central China, was powerless to intervene, and all Feng had to do was to go to the aid of Kuo in Manchuria in order to finish off Chang Tso-lin, perhaps the most disruptive influence in China, for good and all. In occupation of Tientsin, controlling the only railroad from Peking to Mukden, was General Li Ching-lin, an ambitious ex-Tuchun who had served Chang well in the past and had now no intention of seeing Feng upset a balance of power which well suited his own schemes.

For a few days Feng hesitated, knowing that his enemies would hail intervention in behalf of Kuo as evidence that all of his work for peace and disarmament was insincere. The delay was fatal. Not merely was Chang Tso-lin able to rally, encouraged by the Japanese announcement that civil war would not be permitted along the South Manchurian Railway, but Li Ching-lin was able to defend Tientsin with a most modern system of entrenchments in which the hand of foreign military advisers was apparent. Then, in one of the bloodiest battles of modern China, the Kuominchun showed its mettle. On Christmas Eve of 1925, after several days' preliminary fighting, Feng's first army, though far deficient to that of Li in artillery, bombs, and ammunition, stormed the defences of Tientsin with the bayonet. It was an exhibition of disciplined courage which drew gasps of admiration from every foreign military observer in Peking, but it was fruitless. On the very day that Tientsin fell to the National Army, Kuo Sung-ling was defeated, captured, and beheaded three hundred miles to the north. Deeply upset by a slaughter which on both sides cost some ten thousand casualties—the dead were thick on the battlefield when I passed over it on Christmas Day—Feng announced his retirement from public life. After a heroic effort at regeneration, the way was open for the next move in Chinese disintegration.

A month after the battle of Tientsin, I interviewed Marshal Wu Pei-fu at his Hankow headquarters, and was told by him of his intention to overthrow the Kuominchun because "Soviet influence flourishes wherever its troops are established." Regardless of the portion of truth in that asseveration—which might just as logically have induced him to attack Chang Tso-lin because Japanese influence flourishes wherever his troops are established—the famous Marshal did not give me the

impression of being anything more than a courageous and efficient soldier. With famine and banditry rife in the area of China under his control, his entire mind was concentrated on the old myth of unifying China by force. "Disarmament," Wu told me, "is too expensive to be considered now. It will come when a legitimate central government is established in Peking." The trouble is that what is legitimate to Marshal Wu is illegitimate to half his fellow countrymen, and vice versa.

Financed by Chang Tso-lin, Marshal Wu moved his army north from Hankow soon after my talk with him. Simultaneously, Chang marched south from Manchuria, while his allies, Li Ching-lin and Chang Tsung-chang, advanced west from bandit-ridden Shantung. Against this circular attack the Kuominchun, lacking Feng's leadership, greatly outnumbered, and short of munitions, nevertheless put up a heroic resistance. After a number of severe battles, in several of which the unnatural allies were defeated, the Kuominchun withdrew in good order, first to Nankou Pass, northwest of Peking, and then to the Mongolian border, where it still remains intact. The taking of the capital at the end of April, 1926, was marked by grave looting and other excesses, particularly, it is reported, on the part of Chang Tso-lin's brigade of Czarist Russians. Four months after the capture of Peking by Wu and Chang, there was still no civil government functioning there, Dr. W. W. Yen, one of the ablest of the neutral Chinese statesmen, having found it impossible to retain the premiership because of conditions arising from the scarcely suppressed rivalry between Wu and Chang.

So rests the thoroughly depressing political situation at Peking at the time of writing (August, 1926). Centralization by force is again being attempted, but this time by rival militarists who have in the past been bitter

enemies. As a military hegemony in China has always failed before, so, it may be confidently predicted, it will fail again. Feng, product of the simple-minded peasant class, has retired to Moscow, where his past tolerance toward Soviet Russia is likely to be converted to a much more active sympathy. He will not stay in Russia. The Kuominchun awaits his return, while the collapse of Wu Pei-fu before the northern march of the Canton armies shows how hollow are that general's hopes of restoring order by a victorious war on "radicalism."

Meantime, obscured by the confusing political kaleidoscope at Peking, important tendencies in China are steadily taking permanent shape. Having discussed the failure of centralization, let us consider the possibilities of provincial autonomy, as illustrated by the work of the Canton government. The trip from Peking to Canton is, for the reader, a matter of the turning of a page. Let us remember always that the latter city lies two thousand miles due south of China's nominal capital, and that the traveler is lucky, nowadays, if he can make the journey in less than two full weeks.