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Struggle Over China

Working Paper No. 48

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Prepared for Professor John Hall

Abstract: This inquiry seeks to establish that after Dr. Sun Yat-sen thought through and then laid the foundations for the modern Chinese state, a struggle for power emerged between those identifying as nationalists and communists. Sun’s ideas regarding some of the effects of western imperialism on Asian countries were shared by both the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek. The ideological bases for the struggle between the two parties for China emerged in their beliefs regarding relationships between government and citizens, and the role of the government. Soon after Dr. Sun’s death, a struggle for power over the future of China played itself out as war stretching over two decades.

***Journal of Economic Literature* Classification Codes:**

B24, B31, N45, N35, P26

Key Words: Chiang Kai-shek, Chinese Communist Party, Imperialism,
Nationalism, Sun Yat-sen.

This inquiry seeks to establish that after Dr. Sun Yat-sen thought through, formulated, and practically laid out the foundations for the modern Chinese state, a struggle emerged for power between those identifying as nationalists and communists. Dr. Sun's beliefs were heavily influenced by the imperialistic behavior of western countries and he sought to help China emerge as a modern country that could defend itself militarily and economically from foreign powers. After the passing of Dr. Sun, a power void was created that contenders sought to fill. Those identifying as Chinese nationalists as well as communists reacted to this opportunity. Both groups could have worked together to achieve Sun's dream of an independent and modernized China; however, deeply ingrained ideological differences led to a bitter and ongoing struggle over China's future. The nationalists started military action against the Chinese Communist Party soon after Sun passed in an effort to secure their political power. Once initiated, this conflict raged on for decades. Although the nationalists and communists shared Dr. Sun's ideas about imperialism as their starting point, the two groups fought as mortal enemies. Two central issues that the ideologies clashed at were the future relationships between government and its people, and how people were meant to be divided.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen and His Foundation for the Modern Chinese State

Dr. Sun Yat-sen came on the scene during a period in Chinese history in which western powers had seized control of China's trading regulations that included principles to ensure all western products could be sold to the Chinese people. In those years, the fragmented Chinese government was weak and wholly unable to prevent any western power from dictating these trading terms, resulting in China's serving as an outlet for products rather than as a trading partner. What were judged as deep misfortunes affecting the Chinese people and nation state heavily influenced Dr. Sun. he sought a political path in which reform and strengthening China served as his primary goal. Although China was not turned into an economic powerhouse like some other western nations, Sun implemented new policies and reforms that drastically strengthened China in virtually all sectors. Sun laid the foundations for the modern Chinese state and established a path for a successful economic activity in the process.

Interestingly, between the years 1879 and 1882, Sun was schooled in Hawaii. After his studies were completed, still he would return to Hawaii on many different occasions: to continue studying and also taking care of social affairs. In his article "Revisiting the Hawaiian Influence on the Political Thought of Sun Yat-sen," author Lorenz Gonschor (2017, 52-67) notes that Hawaii is where Sun began to formulate his ideas about modern China. Here it was easy for Sun to compare

the institutions of the two nations and see how the weak government of China was failing its people. Hawaii was one of the most developed Oceania countries at the time and served as a basis for Sun's continued study. From Hawaii, Sun returned home to China and eventually rose through the ranks of government to begin his ideological and institutional reforms.

Sun's newly formulated principles and beliefs served to completely reformulate the function of government and the role of the people. According to Theresa Man Ling Lee (2014,131-158), one of these main principles was establishing nationalism as a core belief for the Chinese citizens. This is not a nationalist party or ideology in full, but rather a patriotic morality that needs to be instilled. The world at the time viewed China as resulting in "Family-ism" and "Clan-ism" with little loyalty to the country. Gonschor (2017, 52-67) teaches us that Sun detailed this in his book *The Three Principles of the People* as "Chinese civic nationalism". Sun held that if the Chinese people worked together for the sake of each other and the country, China as a whole would benefit immensely. Beyond this, he even believed that if other Asian countries colonized and abused by western powers have a sense of regional nationalism called "cooperative internationalism" then western influence would be diminished and the countries would be left to prosper.

The next major important view of Sun is implementing democracy as opposed to a dynastic rule. Sun, however, aimed to implement a version of democracy that is distinct from the western nations. He saw these nations' democracies as fundamentally flawed. Sun viewed the western nations' citizens having the right to elect and be elected as an achievement, but the people's beliefs towards the government were completely wrong. The people fear a powerful government that has complete and utter control and therefore resist the government that they themselves elected. As argued by Theresa Man Ling (2014) Sun's solution is to divide society into three different groups based on differences in ability. The first group is those "who see and perceive first". These are people who have better intellect, wisdom, and problem-solving skills. This group would be the leaders of the government and society and decide what is best for the people. The second group would be similar to the first, but instead, they take the word of the first and do minimal deciding. The third group would be where most people fall, these are people who do not perceive and instead just lead normal lives within the country and support the economy. This tiered system would serve to foster trust towards the government as lower-level citizens would trust those who were perceived as having better problem solving skills.

The final important policy-shaping belief that Sun Yat-sen brought to China was the idea of obligations between the state and citizen. Sun believed that the

state was obligated to provide food, clothing, and shelter to citizens that needed it, but only if that citizen was fulfilling their obligations to the economy and society by doing their job. This is essentially a modest welfare program that was intended to ensure that the Chinese people would trust more power to the first group of people to make decisions as long as they were being taken care of. This was not meant to develop into communism however as Sun believed that Chinese people needed a material drive to work and produce to prosper the Chinese state into a modern economy.

Within all of Sun Yat-sen's ideas, you can clearly see traces of both nationalism parties and communist ideals. Sun established a variety of beliefs that could be used for either party and to support different movements.

Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party

In March of 1925 when Dr. Sun died, the Chinese government known as the Kuomintang was on the brink of destruction. There was no immediate successor and the warlords in Northern China were actively claiming territory. These problems were pacified when Lieutenant and close friend of Sun, Chiang Kai-shek, headed the government and assumed control of the military to march north and defeat the warlords. This did not mark the true unification of China or ease the political unrest as a new faction that had been slowly accumulating power during

Sun's time began to show their cards, the communists. Chiang recognized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as his most potent national enemy and in 1927 began a long string of military campaigns against the communists that lasted until his inevitable defeat post Second Sino-Japanese War. In the view of John Israel (1966, 14-18) this began with a party and government purification process that resulted in many communists being killed that were a part of the government and different organizations within Chinese cities. Chiang and the Nationalists were complete opposites in their view of China based on what Sun Yat-sen had built, using his ideas to establish a government and institutions that would serve different interests and people.

General Chiang alters Dr. Sun's ideas about the relationship between government and citizens to better benefit the government or nation and to strengthen the military's might and political standing. The Chinese people should feel obligated to work and supply for the government as protection registers as the primary job of the government, and without an effective military the members of the population remained. This evokes a nationalistic view of the relationship and is clearly influenced by Chiang's advances through the military. General Chiang lays this out in *Chinese Economic Theory*, where he also targets surplus going back to people and private ownership: "The development of productions will result in surplus products, but these should not be privately owned or used for satisfying

private wants (290).” Once again, he establishes that the results of people’s labor and increases in production should directly go the government. This is for increased funding in military sectors and to also benefit those closely connected with the nationalist government. Chiang establishes that it is the obligation of citizens to work in this cycle as it benefits them by benefiting their government and that “It is regrettable if one does not work. What he does is not necessarily for himself. (290)” This is an extreme form of Sun’s ideas where instead of a mutually beneficial relationship, much of the wealth and benefits are concentrated in the government and military which is supposed to help the populous as well. Give all for your country so that it may be powerful.

Another important way in which General Chiang develops Dr. Sun’s ideas to make it more nationalist is his alteration of Sun’s division of society into three groups. Instead of having three distinct groups that have voting privileges and work the society in different way, General Chiang uses a system where the first group who perceive and are very wise get to decide and control the government entirely and make decisions for the others who are not capable of doing so. This ultimately becomes different wealthy families, larger business owners, and party members that support the nationalists who become the decision makers for the rest of society. This is easily manipulated by Chiang and the nationalists so that all of these members are greatly benefited and share in the wealth of the government,

while the poor in China suffered greatly. This situation is very similar to another extreme Nationalist who at the time was beginning to rise to power: Adolf Hitler. By establishing this sort of system where wealth is concentrated into the hand of his political allies, the people that benefit the most are wealthy members of society and the military. This is a very strong combination, but the lack of attention to the peasants served to be the basis of the CCP gaining more power and members resulting in the Nationalists ultimate defeat.

General Chiang's view of the western powers and their imperialism in China and Asia is heavily influenced by Dr. Sun's beliefs on the topic. China had repeatedly been forced into unequal treaties with western nations and an array of imperialistic policies leading up to Sun. Being a close friend of Sun, General Chiang was heavily influenced by him and when Sun died in 1925 and the struggle for China began, one of General Chiang's primary beliefs was to end the imperialistic ways of western nations. General Chiang believed that to truly end wars and suffering of people around the world, imperialism would need to be squashed. Chiang claims that "The nations in Asia have been, on the whole, subjected to bitter sufferings from oppression similar to those of China... (234)", and because of this he reaffirms Sun's idea of "cooperative internationalism". Chiang's other beliefs and policies that build a very nationalist nation would serve

to help make China more powerful and break free of the imperialist grasp of the west.

China's Communist Party

After the death of Sun Yat-sen the communist party had very little realistic ability to seize control of the government and country. Chiang Kai-shek was close to Sun and had control of the military, placing him in an optimal position to seize power. When the CCP was quickly turned on by General Chiang there was no real opposition they could give. As reported by Edmund Clubb (1968, 6-16) in *Communism in China*, in the period before the Japanese invasion of Manchuria the CCP was constantly on the run from the nationalists. Multiple attempts were made to fortify different cities and gain the support of dispersed warlords, but the nationalists led by General Chiang both outnumbered and had better production than the communists. Attempts made by communists in nationalist governed cities to organize and form a coup were quickly discovered and dispelled or killed. The communists had believed they would be persecuted by Chiang following his takeover of the government and had even planned to form a red army to fight against the tide of nationalism, however they did not expect Chiang to act so quickly. The CCP only had 40 members (1968, 6) upon their official entry into the political sphere in 1924, one year before the death of Sun Yat-sen. The

membership was a measly 17,000 in 1927, the year the cooperation between nationalists and communists ended and conflict began. The CCP did not grow and become stronger until the Second Sino-Japanese war. The nationalists and General Chiang despised the communists because they were both a threat to his power and control, and because their ideology and policy were a threat to the implemented status quo.

Before discussing the policy differences between the nationalists and communists, it is important to mention the main goal of the CCP. Clubb teaches us that the CCP sought to establish a “...revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (1968, 98).” To do this the CCP used what happened in the city Canton as an example for the country. Workers and peasantry issued a decree “... for the 8 hour working day, for the confiscation of the landlords’ lands and the turning over of them gratis to the peasants, for the annulling of all cabalistic debt and rent agreements (1968, 98).” The communists desired to overturn the private property system of the wealthy elites and disperse it amongst the people. This uprising in Canton in 1927 was destroyed very quickly as the nationalists were still far more powerful, but it served as a prime example for the CCP.

The beliefs of the communists about the relationship between government and citizens was a stark difference to the nationalists. The government is meant to

be a tool that benefits all people and is obligated to serve every worker. The proletariat does not work for the government, but the government serves to make people's lives easier. Instead of the surplus of labor going to the benefit of the government members and those connected with the government, the wealth is used to improve production and then dispersed back to the people. Not only did the CCP desire "...the socialization of all banks, factories, and railways..." to be controlled by the proletariat democracy, but they also strived for "...the destruction of militarism in China... (Clubb, 1968, 100)." This is a distinct difference to the nationalists as the exact opposite was implemented where only the wealthy, party members, and military reaped the benefits of China's economy. The pendulum swung completely to the left of Dr. Sun's ideas where the obligation is primarily on the government to serve the people.

The CCP recognized the difference in ability between people as Sun did when dividing the Chinese into three groups but believed there was only ever a need for one group. Peasants and workers would naturally rely on smarter individuals than them to help decide how to vote, however, what they decided on was ultimately their decision and should come from their experience. This policy was not truly enacted when the CCP seized control and instead a style of oligarchical communism or socialism was established, but this was the stated and ultimate goal of the communists at the time of the struggle for China. This is, once

again, drastically different to the nationalists where there was no democracy and all power rested in the first group which ended up being the party members, elites, and military.

The CCP's view of imperialism is consistent with that of Sun Yat-sen and the nationalist party. They sought the "Overthrow of Imperialism... (Clubb, 1968, 100)" and believed any imperialistic country would exploit the proletariat in other countries in almost any situation. Where they drastically differ is that the communists saw General Chiang and the nationalist party as imperialists. The CCP considered the persecution of communists and others who did not share your ideology as imperialistic. After a meeting between communists was discovered by the police and all attendees were killed, the CCP responded with "Our task and aim, which burn the hearts of millions, are higher than the hideous and dirty work of the imperialists (Clubb, 1968, 102)." The CCP claims the nationalists were the "imperialist-Kuomintang-landlord-bourgeoisie regime" and that the nationalists were making treaties with other imperialistic countries that served to exploit the peasants and workers (Clubb, 1968, 102). The CCP sought to both destroy the imperialist nationalists in China and help destroy imperialism around the world.

The CCP used some foundations laid by Sun Yat-sen with regards to maintaining democracy and fighting imperialism, but strayed from grouping people, nationalistic policies, and the obligations of people to the government.

They were a very stark difference to the Nationalists with their main objective being to redistribute wealth and property to the peasantry rather than supporting only party members and the elite.

Conclusion

This inquiry has sought to establish that after Dr. Sun Yat-sen laid the foundations for the modern Chinese state, a struggle emerged for power between nationalist and communist. Dr. Sun's vision for the future of China was inherited by both the nationalist and communists, but was altered and bent by their party's ideologies. The communists sought to defeat imperialism and bring prosperity to all workers and peasants with the government serving all under its umbrella. All elites and bourgeoisie members had targets on their backs with the aim of distributing their wealth and nationalizing most industries. The Nationalists also wanted the destruction of imperialism but saw the people as a source to serve the government and build up the inner ring and the military. The elites and wealthy business owners were more important to the nationalists for the prosperity of China. The struggle for China became bloody with the nationalists' attacks on the communists which sparked decades long wars that did not end until the CCP victory in 1946. Sun's ideas can be clearly seen in both of the parties in hopes of encouraging the

development of a modernized China, however these ideas were never carried straight through under the guidance of either party.

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