

## **"MAO AND THE CHINESE REVOLUTION A REVIEW IN THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE"**

---

*Pervez H. Mirza\**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the year 1906 a lad of thirteen of a peasant family from the province of Hunan was standing outside his school. Watching many bean merchants passing down the road from the city of Changsha, the student asked them why they were leaving their native city. The merchants explained that there had been a serious famine that year in Changsha, and the people were starving. In their misery the people had sent a delegation to the Manchu provincial governor begging for food, but the governor had replied: "Why haven't you any thing to eat? The city is full of food. I always have enough." The starving people were enraged by the answer; they attacked the Manchu garrison and threw the governor out the city. A delegation from the Emperor arrived and promised that the things would now be put right. But when a new governor arrived in Changsha, he immediately arrested the leaders of the rebellion, beheaded them and placed their heads on pikes as an example to future rebels, the uprising was crushed. Hence they were fleeing away from their houses.

The young peasant student to whom the bean merchants told their story was Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung)- and the vision of what peasants could do when properly led and organized impressed on his mind thereafter.

Mao was by far the greatest leader in the world-probably the greatest of twentieth century. When I say so it is from the objective perspective of history, the impact he had upon the largest of peoples, occupying a great area of this world, of great and increasing importance for all.

China being the biggest expanse of territory has the longest span of civilization in the human record. It was Mao, who more than any other, transformed this mass, revolutionized society over

---

\* Department of International Relations, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

that vast area and brought them abreast of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The transformation, which are visible, in particular sphere of Chinese society take on their full significance only in the context of the Chinese revolution as a whole. By 'Chinese Revolution' one should understand that in the first instance the struggle carried out by Mao Zedong and his comrades during the past half century, first to achieve power and then to transform their country. The revolution is a continuance of the struggle till the achievement of the goal.

#### BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE REVOLUTION:

China in history never had a revolution as great as at the time of Manchu's fall in 1911-12 AD. The basic cause of this revolution was the immediate past of China's political system. In other words the major responsibility for the outbreak of this great revolution was on the shoulders of the Manchus who belonged to the immediate past. Talking of the Manchu's political past, they had established four major political characteristics: of one man government; importance of ethics in politics and not the law; merging of legislative executive and judicial authorities; and emphasis on ideological powers of government. Further Manchu introduced racial discrimination. It also established an unlimited authority of the emperor. The Manchus became so absolute that they concentrated into their own hands the powers of appointment and removal for all official posts. In the end, the emperors became so powerful that they could not be taught to govern themselves.<sup>1</sup>

There were other reasons also which became ultimate causes of Manchu's fall. Firstly, traditions and precedents bound the emperor. Secondly, he had limitations due to the huge size of his domain and bulk of state business. Thirdly, emperor had a check established by the office of censor ate. Finally, there was the pressure of public opinion on the emperor. In the field of local government the regions occupied a semi-autonomous status in relations to central authorities but the emperor established a power- ful check on the local government functions. The Manchu government imposed heavy taxes on industry and commerce and restricted the expansion of handicraft workshop. Consequently,



big merchants and handicraft workshop owners, instead of investing their money in production, purchased land and participated in civil administration in an attempt to transform themselves into landlords and bureaucrats.<sup>2</sup>

Manchu government also imposed an extremely oppressive system on the non-Manchu nationalities in China, who were denied equal rights in the country. All high positions of the government were reserved for Manchu nobles and they also filled almost all the higher posts. For their trial, Manchu's were taken to special courts, where on committed crimes they received preferential prison treatment. They were also ruthless against those who criticized the regime and were oppressive towards the national minorities. Thus, all these elements came out in the open with a common stand against the oppressors. And the outbreak of revolution in 1911 ultimately over-threw the Manchu ruler and ended the Empire of China, and the Republic of China thus was proclaimed immediately on January 1, 1912.<sup>3</sup>

A revolutionary government was established in the city of Nanjing (Nanking) about 300 miles down the Yangzi from Wuhan (the center of revolution). The leader of the revolution Dr. Sun Yat-Sen founded the Republic of China and became its president. Although the revolution overthrew China's centuries old feudal monarchy and founded a republic, but economically this revolution paved the way for the development of China's national capitalism. As the bourgeoisie being weak by itself, failed to mobilize the broad mass of the people against the reactionary forces. Therefore, the feudal forces continued their dominance and the imperialists retained their privileges. Thus, the democratic revolution remained unfulfilled.<sup>4</sup> The Republic of China operated on an ad-hoc basis for about a year; an elected Parliament finally convened in February 1913. The most powerful party in it was Guomindang (Kuomintang) or National Party.

The birth of the Republic did not end China's internal and external problems and Sun Yat-Sen lacked the power to keep the government on the path. Therefore, a warlord by the name of Yuan Shih-Kai took over the government and attempted to re-establish the monarchy with himself as emperor.<sup>5</sup> Following the

formation of Yuan's government, a few members of the National Assembly met in Canton in 1921, formed a regime there and elected Sun Yat-Sen, as President of China. Sun Yat-Sen could not extend his authority beyond Canton and while he had gone to Beijing (Peking) for negotiations, he died there in 1925 without accomplishing his objectives. Sun Yat-Sen at least left one legacy. He was successful in restoring some measure of unity and confidence to the suppressed masses. This legacy took two shapes, the Nationalists and Communists.<sup>6</sup>

After the death of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen the coalition of the Nationalists and Communists was broken before the new leader Chiang Kai-Shek proclaimed his presidency in 1928 with Nanjing as its capital.

During the time of coalition of Sun Yat-Sen the communist group of China was organizing a political party. In 1920 a communist group was formed in Shanghai. In 1921 students in France formed a Chinese Socialist Youth League. During the same days Mao Zedong also set up a Chinese Socialist Youth League in China. The Marxism-Leninism became the guide to the Chinese workers revolutionary struggle. Thus the first National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was able to meet in Shanghai 1921. This congress formally founded the communist party of China on the pattern of Russian Bolshevik Party.<sup>7</sup>

The Russian influence on Communist leaders led to the decline of Chiang Kai-Shek's regime, and by 1928 many provincial governments declared their independence. Later Japan's entry into Manchuria in 1931 further weakened Chiang's regime. Although on Japan's entry the Nationalists and Communists united together against the foreign aggression, but after Japan's defeat in 1945, Mao and Chiang again opposed each other and this time with arms.<sup>8</sup>

Mao Zedong had spread his armies throughout China to face the Nationalists, led by Chiang, and had promised land reforms, political freedom and national security, whereas Chiang had nothing to offer except frustration. By now the Chinese had



lost faith in Chiang promise of a "New Life", and on the other hand Mao's forces were winning battles on military fronts as well as in the political arena. Ultimately, in 1949 Mao's communist party declared the establishment of its government in China under the name of Peoples Republic of China. Chiang's nationalists were forced to migrate and landed in Taiwan (Formosa).

### BIRTH OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Communism in China was introduced on its land through the introduction of Marxism-Leninism. The student's movement of 1919 was responsible for its birth. That year a number of demonstrations were started which were led by intellectuals against the Versailles conference decisions of conceding to Japan the former German rights in Shandong (Shantung) province. From there a general awakening arose. This brought a popular demand for political and social reform with a rise of national consciousness. This was the background that founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China.<sup>9</sup>

The first task of the CCP was to find out its exact relationship with the Guomindang. Lenin had taught that the communist movement should merge into the major stream of the national liberation movement and thus in 1922 the CCP had joined the Guomindang. But side-by-side, on secret basis the Chinese communists maintained their membership in the communist part also.<sup>10</sup>

The Soviet Union kept sending its advisors to China and continued assisting Chinese on revolutionary tactics. The Soviet government also maintained a friendly diplomatic relations with Beijing, and succeeded in maintaining Guomindang-communist unity. During the first party congress Guomindang, which was held in January, 1924, Chinese communists were given important positions in the Guomindang Organization and Mao was on its Central Executive Committee but Mao's position was subordinate and his views were not adverted.<sup>11</sup>

By the year 1926, the Guomindang was facing many internal and external threats. Taking advantage of this unrest, the communists started campaigns in rural and also in urban areas, with the help of peasants and workers to create a wider unrest in the country. By 1927, certain communists had established their revolutionary regime, which led to an open conflict between the Guomindang and the communists. The two groups fought with each other from 1927 to 1949. Mao Zedong had already established the Red Army of workers and peasants. This Red Army, numbering some 100,000 men broke out of the Guomindang blockade, and headed westwards on the first stage of the epic long march.<sup>12</sup>

The Long March, an historic epic of endurance, lasted just over one year during which time the Red Army traveled 6,000 miles. In the initial stages of the march, they suffered considerable losses at the hands of hostile troops, while passing through Guangdong (Kwangtung) and Guangxi (Kwangsi). This Long March of the Red Army opened the path to liberation, and ultimately bought the downfall of the Guomindang in the mainland of China. This ushered in the success of the CCP in forming its government in China on October 1, 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong.<sup>13</sup>

## MAO'S IDEOLOGY

The history of the CCP showed us that how the new government founded in China. We noticed that it was the new ideology, which was firstly introduced to the intellectuals of the country, and then with the rapid speed was spread on the whole main land. It was the ideology that became the real backbone in making the "New China" of 1949.

The ideological influences in China were led and then spread under the leadership of Mao Zedong. His leadership is, undoubtedly responsible of making "New China". Mao's China was oriented toward Russia. It regarded Russia as the leader and the teacher in the new democracy. Thus Mao's philosophy had its origin in Marxism. The Marxism influences on Mao brought his understanding of the class struggle. He believed that revolution



was possible in China in spite of being its agrarian society, because here also there was a class struggle of Haves and Have-nots. Thus, Mao also stood up for the struggle and gave it the shape of revolution with the adaptation of arms method, which was not used by Marx. He wanted to strengthen the people's state machine, which was the people's army, the people's police and the people's court. According to him, this could be the only machine to defend the nation and to secure the protection of the people's interests.<sup>14</sup>

Mao's ideology was influenced by Leninism-Stalinism also. He had committed that the communist party of the Soviet Union was the teacher of the CCP. In Mao's philosophy CCP stands for the rights and actions of the proletariat. In that firstly, the communists are to help to unite the people of various nationalities and not to divide them. Secondly, the communism is beneficial not harmful, in socialist transformation and socialist construction. Thirdly, the communists are to help to consolidate, not undermine or weaken the people's democratic dictatorship. Fourthly, the communists are to help to consolidate, not undermine or weaken, democratic centralism. Fifthly, the communists tend to strengthen, not to cast off or weaken, the leadership of the communist party. And finally, communism is beneficial not harmful to international socialist solidarity and the solidarity of the peace-loving peoples of the world.<sup>15</sup>

These principles of Mao Zedong are the ones that motivate the Chinese society and it is because of his successful and unchallenged leadership, that the whole society of the "New China" has been following his ideology.

## CONCLUSION

Twentieth century has witnessed radical alterations and changes almost in every part of the world, but few areas have been transformed more than China. First the imperial authority, which ruled the China since long was brought down; it was beset by internal warfare and foreign pressure. The republic revolution of 1911 brought an end to imperial rule in China. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen became the provisional president, soon the central authority

collapsed completely and the country was divided among provisional warlords. Incapable of organized defense, China became prey of foreign powers. Corrupt officials, marauding armies and natural disasters periodically ravaged the peasantry.

China's recovery began under the Guomindang (Nationalists). They crushed the warlord-supported government, then established a new Republic of China and ruled the Chinese mainland until 1949. By the predominant force of the Communists led by Mao Zedong, they had to escape from the mainland and today in retreat on Taiwan.

It was Mao, who brought drastic and radical transformation of the Chinese society; he came to glorify peasants as the true masses. The formation of Communist party of China was the vanguard of the Chinese peasants and the working class. The CCP takes Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding ideology.

The founding of the People's Republic in 1949 marked China's entry in the socialist stage. During the long period of historical development, the industrious, courageous, and intelligent Chinese people of all nationalities collectively created a great civilization. They marked great contribution to all mankind.



## REFERENCES

1. Karim Arshad Syed, *The People's Republic of China*, Progressive Publishers, Lahore, 1971, P. 15
2. Edwin E. Moise, *Modern China- A History*, Longman, London, 1994, Pp. 32-33
3. Ibid, P.23
4. Lin Yi, *A Short History of China: 1840-1919*, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1965, P. 85
5. C.P.Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China*, Pelican Books, London, 1973, P. 48
6. Karim Ashad Syed, *Opp. cited*, P. 25
7. Helen G. Mathew, *Asia in the Modern World*, Mentor Books, New York, 1978, P. 102
8. Karim Arshad Syed, *Opp. cited*, 27
9. Dun J. Li, *History, China Hand Book Series*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1982, Pp. 140-144
10. Karim Ashad Syed, *Opp. cited*, P. 45
11. Robert Goldstone, *The Rise of Red China*, Fawcett Publication, Conn., 1967, P. 111
12. Dun J. Li, *Opp. cited*, P.157
13. Walter D.J., *The Government and Politics of Communist China*, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, London, 1973, P.33
14. Guy Wint, *Common Sense About China*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1960, Pp. 67-68
15. Karim Arshad Syed, *Opp. cited*, P. 54