

March, 1953 .

The Evolution of An **l-Communist** Chinese Youth

A Case Study

by **A. Doak Barnett**

The role of individuals in revolutionary upheavals is not an easy one to understand when viewed from a distance. Probably the majority of individuals in a revolutionary situation look upon the great struggles and changes in which they are involved as things out of their control, caused by vague and powerful forces which they only dimly understand. Historians may analyze a revolution in much the same **way** as a meteorologist studies the high and low pressure areas of a storm. A small minority of men who emerge as political leaders in a revolution may assume the role of rain-makers and attempt to harness and direct the forces at work. But the majority view events with the subjective helplessness of men riding a small rowboat through a storm. They are usually preoccupied with the tasks of preventing their own boat from capsizing, of riding the next wave, and of coping with the next gust of **wind**.

In the revolution in China, for example, relatively few of the people involved have been able to analyze the political struggle in process in terms of clear-cut issues and to determine their attitudes and actions accordingly. On the contrary, except for small groups of men who have provided the leadership of the major political groups, the attitudes and actions of most people have been determined by the many circumstances and events which have affected them personally.

This would apply, to a large extent, even to educated Chinese youth, one of the **most politically-conscious** and politically-influential groups in the country. During the decade prior to the Chinese **Communists'** conquest of power in China in 1949, the trend among students and other youth groups in the country was steadily to the left in politics, and many joined the Communist Party and its affiliated political and military movements. When the **Communists** came to power, this group became one of the bulwarks of their regime. But even among this group, **it** is not possible to say that many of these young Chinese really understood Communism or made a clear choice between Communism and alternative philosophies or ways of life. Nor is it possible to say that the small minority of young Chinese who did not jump on the bandwagon all

made a clear-cut decision against Communism. The causes which made different persons move in different political directions were numerous and complicated, and often accidental.

Perhaps this can be illustrated by the case of Li **Ma-lun**, a young man who is now an anti-Communist White **Chinese** refugee in Hong Kong, (Note: Li **Ma-lun** is not the **man's** real name, but the following brief account of his life is completely factual.)

-----

Li **Ma-lun** was born in 1922 in Shanghai, **China's** largest city and the main center of Western influence and modern economic development in the country. His father was a professional diplomat, educated in Belgium, who served in the diplomatic service of the Peking government for many years despite rapid changes in the political regime in power.

**Ma-lun** spent his early years in several large Chinese cities: Shanghai, Peking, and Foochow. He also spent one year, while he was very young, in Vancouver, where his father served in the Chinese consulate, but he remembers very little of his stay there.

"As well as I can remember my first interest in politics," **Ma-lun** says, "was at the time of the Sian incident in 1936, when Generalissimo Chiang **Kai-shek** was kidnapped by General Chang Hsueh-liang in Northwest China. Although I was only fourteen at the time, I can remember very vividly the reaction in Shanghai when the Generalissimo was released. There was a tremendous celebration, and everybody shot off fire-crackers. I was greatly impressed by the firecrackers. I can also remember people saying that this would usher in a '**golden age for China**'."

The Japanese invaded China, for the second time in less than a decade, in 1937, when **Ma-lun** was 15 and was a student in St. John's middle school (high school) in Shanghai. "That was a period of great excitement," he says, trying to remember how he felt as a boy in his teens. "I don't know if I really hated the Japanese then, but I was certainly caught up in the wave of patriotism and general anti-Japanese feeling. The boy scout troop to which I belonged helped run a camp for refugees, and it was exciting to give out food, and to act as **sentries**."

"We had a history teacher in school," **Ma-lun** recalls, "who took time out from regular classwork to describe the progress of the war to us. We were fascinated."

"During the battle in Shanghai, my patriotism was greatly aroused. I was one of two boys in my school who volunteered to carry a Nationalist flag to the '**Lone Battalion**,' which held out for a long time in the Post Office building across Soochow Creek.

(The International Settlement in Shanghai, where **Ma-lun** lived, was neutral territory in 1937.) I **wasn't** chosen, but all of us went down to the creek to see the flag after it had been **erected.**"

"**After** the Japanese captured Shanghai, a few of my fellow middle school students left for the interior, where the war was still going on, Some of them even joined the army. I wanted badly to go too, but my parents **wouldn't** let **me.**"

"**The** first political literature I ever read," says **Ma-lun**, "**was** a magazine called Sheng Huo, which I occasionally saw when I was in middle school. It **was** not communist. Perhaps it wasn't even leftist; I **don't** remember. But it did have articles critical of the Kuomintang (Nationalists). I **wasn't** greatly impressed, and forgot about them soon thereafter, but in later years I remembered those critical **articles.** As far as the Communists were concerned, however, I **didn't** know anything about them when I **was in** middle **school.**"

After completing middle school, **Ma-lun** entered St. Johns University, one of the best American-supported institutions in China. He studied political science, and at first thought he wanted to follow his **father's** footsteps and become a diplomat. By the time he graduated in 1943, however, he had decided to become a newspaperman.

"**As** I said," **Ma-lun** continues, "I **didn't** know anything of the Communists when I was in middle school, and **can't** remember even having heard of them. But some of my schoolmates a class above me, were more politically-conscious. They sneaked off and joined a guerilla unit, under **Communist** leadership, which was fighting the Japanese. I first heard of the Communists when they returned. I was a freshman in college then. They were **disillusioned** by their experience, but I was never too clear why, since they **didn't** talk much about it to **me.**"

Upon graduation, **Ma-lun** went to work as a bookkeeper in a pharmacy in Shanghai, to help support himself and his family. Then, suddenly, he was arrested by the Japanese and jailed for seven days, Two cousins of his, who were active in an anti-Japanese group in Peking, had been taken into custody and somehow implicated him. But since he **was** not involved in politics, the Japanese released him.

"After my release from **prison,**" **Ma-lun** says, "I decided I must go to the interior and join the fight against the Japanese. Somebody had to stay in Shanghai to support the family, however, so my one brother and I drew lots. He lost, and I **left.**" And so **Ma-lun** entered into the military and political struggles in China--the military cannot be separated from the political--because, at

the age of 22, he decided that he must fight the Japanese. He had no real knowledge or conception then of the struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists, which had already been going on in local areas of China, in a bitter fashion, with only brief truces since 1927. The wartime anti-Japanese truce between the Nationalists and Communists had already broken down almost completely.

"My destination," Ma-lun relates, "was Sian, but it took over a year to get there. First I went by rail from Shanghai to Pengpu, to the North. From there on I went the whole way on foot (almost 1,000 miles), with numerous stops. My first long stop was at a town on the Anhwei-Honan border. This town was a gathering place for merchants and was also a center where the Nationalist 78th Army recruited for troops. I offered my services to help in recruitment. But the 78th was very corrupt and did a lot of trade in opium. We had constant trouble, also, with local militia units, which in this area were really organized bandit groups. They demanded opium and guns. One day a group of several thousand of them attacked a unit of the 78th which I was with. About three-fourths of our 1,000 men were killed, and we retreated. At a small village where we stopped, we ran into representatives of another Nationalist group, a guerilla outfit operating in Southern Honan. Four students and myself joined them."

"This Nationalist guerilla outfit was good, and impressed me considerably. The local people helped us, even though they would not tolerate any other Nationalist unit in the area, and we did a lot of work disrupting Japanese-held railways. We even got help in doing it from Chinese puppet troops working for the Japanese. This was an area of really complicated guerilla activity, however, and we fought with Communist and puppet units as well as with the Japanese. The Communists kept pretty much to the mountains, and we didn't clash with any large units, although we did fight some small Communist groups. My impression of the Communists at that time was very bad. A friend of mine was captured by them and escaped to tell us many stories of their brutalities. In retrospect, I don't know if all of his stories were true, but at the time I believed them and we looked on the Communists as well as the Japanese as enemies. But, of course, there were many Chinese students joining the Communists' guerillas in this period, and I guess one's reactions depended on the particular units one saw in action, or heard about."

After almost a year, Ma-lun decided that he still wanted to go to Sian, in order to reach the main Free China base in the interior, and because he was educated and young he was allowed by the guerilla unit to go, together with four others. He arrived in Sian in early 1945, with no money and no real plans. But he soon found an opening for English interpreters, took a test, passed, and was flown to Kunming in Southwest China for special training.

"Within two weeks after I reached Kunming I became fed up and angry," Ma-lun now says, looking back at that period. "As you know Kunming was a major base for American military activity in China during the war, and it was swarming with Americans. It seemed to me that our Chinese officers were devoting most of the effort to trying merely to please the Americans, and I **didn't** like them for that. I also got angry at many American officers I saw. For example, I remember, one incident of our training school when a number of us ran out to get in line for lunch and were stopped by an American colonel who yelled 'Wait, you damned Chinese.' It was this **man's** first time in China, and he obviously **didn't** like it. But we 'damned Chinese' **didn't** like it either. A lot of American GI's used to irritate us, too, by talking big--never the ones you got to know personally, but the ones you saw on the streets. We **didn't** like them, or the 'jeep girls' whom they attracted,"

"Free China at that time was pretty much of a mess," Ma-lun remembers. "Inflation was getting out of hand, and with it came widespread corruption. In Kunming, Lung Yun's warlord regime, which controlled all Yunnan Province and was really not under central Nationalist control, was really **bad.**"

"Kunming was then the main educational center in free China, to which several big universities had evacuated, and the college students became more and more dissatisfied—with general conditions, with Lung Yun's warlord regime, with the Nationalists, and with the Americans too. Among the students it became **fashionable** to be completely disgruntled, and pro-Communist feeling was strong when I was there. A few very able professors, who were liberals and anti-Kuomintang, had a widespread influence among the students. There was more and more inclination to believe the best about the Communists and the worst about the Nationalists, with very little consideration of ideology or **theory.**"

"I was influenced by the general atmosphere, as were most other **people,**" says Ma-lun. "In addition to all the factors I have mentioned I now recognize another strong feeling I had then. I was frustrated and **bitter** about the **Americans** because I **felt--** or they **made** me feel--inferior. They ignored me and I resented it. I wouldn't have **admitted** any sense of inferiority then, but I do now, looking back at it. I think this was widespread and influenced many to become **pro-Communist**. In my case, I **didn't** become pro-Communist probably because of what I had heard about them in **Honan**. But I did become increasingly disgusted with Kunming, the Americans, and the Nationalists. Finally, I quit my training school and joined the Students Army then being formed, I was flown to India to train with them, but the war ended a few weeks **later.**"

After the war, Ma-lun decided to start his career as a

newsman. He made his way back to Shanghai and worked first for the Shang Pao (a newspaper) and then for the Commercial Press.

"It may seem strange to you," he says, "but it wasn't until I was in Shanghai after the war that I saw or read any Communist literature. In Kunming I read a lot of pro-Communist material, but never any written by the Communists themselves. After the war, though, when the fighting between the Nationalists and the Communists came out into the open, I did read the writings of Mao Tse-tung and others. They were mostly writings about the Japanese war, and land reform, and 'New Democracy.' In many respects I was impressed by them. I was impressed by their revolutionary ideas--by the idea that to construct a new society you have to uproot the past and start all over again. I almost came to the conclusion myself that the ends justify the means--that even brutality is justified to bring about reform. I felt that there had been talk, talk, talk about reform for years and almost nothing done. I couldn't see any alternative but **revolution.**"

"But in spite of the way I felt, when I was offered a job in the Nationalists' official Central News Agency in Nanking, I accepted. I suppose it was because I didn't really have any firm political beliefs. This was my first job where I had to write in English, and to improve my knowledge of the language I started to read English-language books. I read a little Western philosophy, and accepted some of the ideas I read. I started to read the Bible, mainly to learn English, and for some reason it appealed to me. The Reader's Digest also had an influence on me. And I gradually came to believe in one world, in the Christian idea that you shouldn't treat people badly however good your motives are, that ends don't justify means. I even came to the conclusion that no matter how bad the Nationalists were the aim of at least some of their leaders was democracy, while the aim of the Communists was totalitarianism."

"A Catholic priest I met in Nanking had a great personal influence on me. He was friendly and eloquent and talked about social problems rather than about religion as such. In the end, he converted me, and I became a Catholic."

"But not many of my friends in Nanking," says Ma-lun, "thought the way I did. I came to the conclusion that individual people are the most important thing, and that the Communists sacrifice individuals for 'the party' or 'the country'. But most of my friends concluded that the Communists were like a tidal wave, impossible to stop, and that they were ushering in a 'Great Epoch--a 'Ta Shih Tai.' When I talked about leaving, as the Communists approached, they used to say, 'What's the use of going away? Why don't you accept it? Anyway, you are a Chinese, after all and the Communists are going to rule China.' They hoped and believed that the Communists might be able to make China strong

and great once again, Nobody expected the Nationalists to be able to hold out, in Taiwan (Formosa) or elsewhere. They felt, as I said, that 'this is the time for Communism and The Communists are like a great historical tidal wave'."

"Finally, however," says Ma-lun, "I decided to leave, to go to Hong Kong. But I **didn't** expect to fight back. It was really an escape from reality. Most of my friends who stayed **didn't** have a very good idea of what **Communism** is, in my opinion, or really why they were staying, except that **it** seemed to them the only thing to do. And I **didn't have** a very good idea of why I **was** leaving. Most of them, furthermore, **didn't** have the money or opportunity to consider **leaving**. It so happened that I **did**."

"You ask me what I think the people I knew in **Nanking** feel about the Communists **now**," Ma-lun continued. "**That's** hard to say. Undoubtedly, many are disillusioned, but feel helpless to do anything about it. Many of them, however, may force themselves, to think the **Communists** are **right**, because that is the only way they can get along. Although this might sound incomprehensible to you, I believe that if I had decided to stay in China I might now be pro-Communist--I might have forced myself to be **pro-Communist**."

But **Ma-lun** did not stay. He came to Hong Kong as a political refugee and **resumed** his newspaper work on a local paper. For two years after coming to Hong Kong, however, he maintained political neutrality. The issues still seemed somewhat confused in his mind, and anyway he **didn't** see any basis for fighting back against Communism, against a 'tidal wave.' During those two years, however, he did a lot of thinking, and some of the basic issues crystallized in his mind. During the two years, also, it began to appear to him that maybe there is some basis and hope for opposing Communism. He met people who were writing, thinking, and organizing opposition against the Communists. **Finally**, within the past year, he joined the **anti-Communist** camp--not organizationally, because he still does not belong to any political group, but spiritually and ideologically, for he has definitely committed himself as an opponent of **Communism**.

-----

Li **Ma-lun** cannot be considered a "**typical**" Chinese youth, but it would be difficult to find such a "typical" youth. Almost every individual is an "**exception**" in one respect or another.

The evolution of his thinking and attitudes does reveal, however, some of the circumstances and influences which affected Chinese of his age, during the revolution of the past few years, and forced them to move in either a pro-Communist or anti-Communist direction.

A. Doak Barnett  
A, Doak Barnett