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GENERAL BACKGROUND ON CHINA

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George Wingrove Cooke, China correspondent of the London Times in 1857-58, once apologized for his reluctance to generalize about China and remarked, wisely, that "a smart writer, entirely ignorant of the subject, might readily strike off a brilliant and antithetical analysis, which should leave nothing to be desired but the truth".

The danger of attempting to describe the background of an immensely complicated situation in a few pages lies in the possibility of distorting or actually perverting the facts. This is especially true of a country in the throes of a revolution which is producing rapid and violent change. Nonetheless, there have been requests for an AUPS newsletter containing basic background information on China, so I shall proceed to set forth a few generalizations about the country, as a basis for further inquiry and discussion. There is no chance of this being a "brilliant and antithetical analysis", but I shall run the inevitable risk of oversimplifying and leaving "nothing to be desired but the truth".

China is a country of over 450 million people. The Nationalist Government in 1947 estimated the total population to be 462 million, but demographers like to argue about the exact figure, and they have had ample opportunity to do so because of the scarcity of reliable statistics. All agree, however, that almost one fifth of the world's population is Chinese.

The majority of Chinese, over ninety percent of the country's population, are generally referred to as Han Chinese; they predominate in the country's great agricultural plains and river valleys which are the centers of concentrated population. In addition to the Han, however, China contains many racial minority groups, located principally in the continental borderland regions and mountainous areas of the country. The most important ones are the Mongols in the northern Inner Mongolian provinces, the Tibetans in the Southwest, the Chinese Muslims in Northwest China, and the Turkis in Chinese Turkestan. Altogether there are at least 60 minority groups, totaling perhaps 40 millions. These minorities constitute a continuing problem of internal administration in China,

The Han Chinese are the most ancient social group with continuous cultural and political traditions now in existence. Chinese culture has held them together despite many centrifugal forces. This does not mean, however, that they are completely homogeneous. On the contrary, there are numerous regional variations in China. There are considerable differences, for example, between the North and the South. The North is a land of brown, dry plains growing wheat and millet crops; the South is a land of green,

wet valleys growing rice. There are special characteristics and traditions which have grown up around individual provinces and **regions**. In addition, there are many dialect divisions. Various forms of the dialect called Mandarin are now spoken over much of the **country**, but the local variations are considerable, and there are other dialects such as Cantonese and Fukienese, each spoken by large numbers of people, which are unintelligible to Mandarin groups. One very important cultural factor which has been a force for unity despite diversity has been the written language which is uniform for all Han Chinese. This written language, based on ideographs instead of phonetic symbols, has cut across dialect barriers and, and even though literacy has always been confined to a minority, it has helped to tie the country together,

The home territory occupied by the Chinese stretches from the cold regions of Manchuria to the tropical island of Hainan, and from the wet coasts touching the East China Sea to the arid deserts of Central Asia, China is bordered by Korea, the Soviet Union, Outer Mongolia (since its formal separation from China in 1945), Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, (Tibet before reestablishment of Chinese control there by the Communists), Nepal, Burma, and Indo-China. The Yellow and East China Seas separate it from Japan and the Philippines.

There is tremendous variety in this area of roughly 3,750,000 square miles (larger than the U.S. including all of its overseas territories), but mountains and rivers determine the concentration of population. Mountains cover most of the country, and the population is consequently crowded into a few plains and river valleys, the most important of which are the North China plain, Szechuan plain, Yangtze valley and Canton delta. Rivers are the lifelines of these population centers.

Because so much of the country is covered by mountains, the pressure on the land is intense. China, with over three times the population of the United States, has less cultivated land than the United States, and China does not have any significant area of unused land still to be cultivated. Life in China is sustained by extremely intensive cultivation. On the average almost 1500 persons are supported by each square mile of cultivated land, and there is less than half an acre of food-producing territory per person. This ratio of man to land is one of the most fundamental, inescapable facts of life in China; it means over-population, and poverty, which have a profound influence on all aspects national life - including politics,

Chinese culture has had a continuous development for three to four thousand years, but until the 19th century the process of change was fairly slow. The social and economic structure which took shape roughly 2,000 years ago in the relative isolation of the Chinese sub-continent proved to be remarkably durable, and although China experienced periodic dynastic changes, civil wars, and peasant upheavals, the basic pattern of life continued with only minor changes from the first unification of the country, at the time of the revolution of 221 B.C., to the destruction of the imperial monarchy in the revolution of 1911.

Traditionally, four fifths of China's population has lived in villages, dependent upon agriculture for a livelihood, working the soil with their hands, illiterate, politically passive. Although the situation has varied in different places and at different periods, frequently the ownership

of much of the **land** has been concentrated in the hands of a minority, the land-owning gentry, whose privileged **economic** position carried predominant social and political influence,

Approximately one-fifth of the **Chinese population** has lived in cities and walled towns. In traditional **China**, these people included **merchants**, land-owners, **government bureaucrats** and officials, the **scholar-literati**, military men, and so on. There was a considerable gap between urban upper and rural lower classes, but a degree of social mobility was **maintained**, and some persons of all classes **climbed** the **social ladder** to **join** the scholar-literati **group** which **formed** the bureaucracy and administered the country under the **central** monarchy.

The paternalistic family has been the foundation of social life in China and in the past it has provided a source of strength and stability to the country. **Even** the pattern of government under the **pre-1911** empire was **governed** by Confucianist conceptions of the **family** system, and both **personal** and national life were **regulated** by accepted rules of **family** relations.

Agriculture has been the basis of the Chinese economy - the principal productive activity in the country. Capitalism never developed in **pre-1911** China, and the **merchant class** held low prestige and exercised relatively little influence on national life. **Before** the impact of the West, China had not **begun** a process of commercial-industrial **development** such as that **which** took place earlier in the West,

Government in **pre-1911** China was authoritarian but by-and-large laissez-faire. At the top of the hierarchy was the emperor, and under him a well-developed bureaucracy **administered** the various provinces and other divisions of the country. Considerable local autonomy existed at the lowest levels of **government**, however, and **many** aspects of **life** were not included in the scope of government regulation. The government, through its **centralized** bureaucracy, levied taxes, constructed and repaired great public works, and **maintained** order, **but** it did not exercise control over all local affairs,

The stability of traditional **China** began to disintegrate in the 19th century. Internally, for reasons **newer** completely **explained** by students of China, the population of the country went through a rapid process of increase, **from** 143 million in 1741 to 432 **million** in 1851 (according to some estimates), and **this** produced a serious agrarian crisis by the **mid-19th** century. Simultaneously, the Manchu **dynasty** went through a process of **internal** decay. Then, after the Opium War in 1840-42, the West, **technologically** superior to **China**, began penetrating the **country** and exerting a strong influence upon it. Old values were discredited by imported **ideas**. Handicraft production in the Chinese rural **economy** was disrupted. **China's** independence was **compromised** by special rights and concessions **demande**d by foreign powers.

The Chinese revolution, which is still going on, **can** be dated to about that time. The first great **outbreak** was the T'ai'ping Rebellion of 1851-64. Then **came** demands for constitutional reform in the 1890's.

Later, under Sun Yat-sen's slogans of the "Three People's Principles" (democracy, nationalism, and people's livelihood), the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty was accomplished in 1911. This marked the passing of the old order, but there followed a period of internal chaos and warlordism which lasted for many years. Finally, under the impetus of growing nationalism, Chiang Kai-shek inherited the mantle of Sun and led the revolution of 1925-28 which established a new government. The Nationalist Government set up by Chiang maintained power from 1928 until 1949 when, weakened by the war with Japan and having lost much of its internal support, it was overthrown by the Chinese Communists.

Since 1949 the Chinese Communists have established firm military and political control over a larger territory - including all of China's borderlands except Outer Mongolia which has become a Soviet satellite - than my government in recent Chinese history, and the Nationalist regime is now in exile on the island of Taiwan (Formosa).

Ideologically the main currents of the Chinese revolution which brought first the Nationalists and subsequently the Communists to power have been ideas imported from the West: nationalism, democracy, social and economic reform. Before the 19th Century there was nothing comparable to modern nationalism in China. The Chinese looked upon their country as the civilized world, beyond which there was nothing but the barbarians. Chinese became aware of modern national states when China was militarily defeated by them, and many Chinese decided that to deal with this new world China must itself become a strong modern nation-state. The ideal of democracy was adopted from the West by Chinese intellectuals groping for something new to replace the shattered and discredited structure of imperial, Confucianist China. Most of the modern intellectual and political leaders of China, whether belonging to the Nationalists, Communists or other groups, have rejected much of China's past and have aimed to make China a strong, modern, industrialized, "democratic" country in the image of the West.

The Chinese Communists entered the revolutionary scene relatively late. The party was not organized until 1921, and its real development of power took place during the Sino-Japanese War. Although from the first the Chinese Communists have been an integral part of the Soviet-led Communist world revolution, they won the struggle for power within China by capitalizing on the main currents of the Chinese revolution. The growth of their strength was proportionate to the decline of the Nationalists' strength, which was undermined by foreign aggression and internal disruption. Finally, on the basis of an alliance of peasants and dissatisfied intellectuals the Communists overthrew the Nationalists in the 1945-49 civil war.

The basic strategy of the Chinese Communists, which crystallized after early failures, was to establish control over definite geographical bases, to organize peasants into armed revolutionary forces, to undermine, isolate and attack the urban centers of Nationalist power, and finally to consolidate their forces and overthrow the government by military force. This strategy proved to be successful, and it is significant that the Chinese Communists now assert that, "The classic type of revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries is the Chinese revolution."

Although the raw material out of which a revolutionary force was built consisted primarily of peasants, the Chinese **Communists have always** maintained, in **orthodox Communist** fashion, that the spearpoint of the revolution has been the **proletariat**, led by the **Communist Party**. In actual fact, the role of the Chinese proletariat has been insignificant, and the real leadership of the **Communists'** revolution has been drawn from the **intelligentsia** - persons motivated by nationalistic impulses and attracted by promises of social reform, democracy (the **Communists** consistently have used democratic slogans), and national development. Under this leadership, peasant **support** was attracted on the basis of anti-Japanese **patriotism** and promises of land **reform**.

Although using **democratic** slogans the Chinese **Communist regime** is the **inheritor** of traditional Chinese ideas of authoritative **rule** and **Communist ideas** of totalitarian rule. It rejects **Western liberal conceptions** of democracy. The party itself is an orthodox **Communist Party**, modelled on **Leninist-Stalinist lines**, organized with strict discipline according to the **principles** of "**democratic centralism**". The Peking government set up on October 1, 1949, is the creature of the party; this is also true of the **army**, now call the **People's Liberation Army**, and the mass organizations for labor, peasants, youth, **women** and other groups through which the **party exercises much** of its control. The party accepts **Marxism-Leninism**, together with the elaborations of **Stalinism**, but it has itself made a certain contribution to the "treasury of **Marxism-Leninism**", in the form of interpretation and **adaption to local conditions**, which might be called "**Maoism**".

The Chinese **Communists** have consistently looked for ideological leadership to the Soviet Union, have considered themselves a **part** of the world revolutionary struggle, and **have** received Soviet **moral**, and occasionally material, support. But in one respect, the Chinese **Communists** differ from most **Communist** groups outside of the Soviet Union; they have gained **power** largely as a result of their **own** efforts, and they control their **own** military forces. At present, however, the **alliance between Peking and Moscow**, apparently based **upon** the conviction that a close **mutuality** of interests **exists**, seems to be very **firm**, and the relationship is probably regarded by the **Chinese** as one of junior partnership.

The Chinese **Communist Party**, with **Mao Tse-tung** as chief, is rigidly controlled by a **small Central Committee** which rules **through** regional bureaus and a **party** hierarchy reaching down to grassroots branches and cells. **Party membership** is officially reported to be 5,800,000, or **only** a little **over** one percent of the population, but it has **the most** effective and complete **control** over the country of any group in Chinese history. The **government** through which it rules is **thoroughly** authoritarian, autocratic, and totalitarian. **Nominally**, it consists of a coalition of the **Communists** and several minor parties, **but** in terms of **power** the coalition is fictional. The **Communists** make the decisions. At the top, **power** is concentrated in the Central **People's Government Council** which **combines** executive and legislative functions and, the **Government Administration Council**, a **cabinet-like body**.

Police state methods of rule, intensive propaganda **and** mass "**campaigns**," organization of **almost** the entire population into Communist-controlled groups, and **widespread indoctrination** are the techniques by which the Chinese **Communists** are able to control the country and advance their revolution, despite **widespread disillusion** since their rise to power. In three short **years**, the Chinese **Communists** have been able to control and **organize** the **Chinese people** to

a degree many persons would have thought impossible before 1949.

The ultimate goal of the Chinese Communists' program is a Communist state, but they conceive of the revolutionary process as one of several stages. The first stage, directed principally against what they label "feudalism" and "imperialism", is considered to be basically completed as a result of their vigorous efforts to root out Western (other than Communist or Soviet) influence and their violent program of agrarian reform. The present stage - "The period of New Democracy" - is to lay the groundwork for future socialism,

In their agrarian program, the Communists have confiscated the land of landlords and have redistributed it to landless and landpoor peasants, eliminating the landlord class. Private ownership has been retained, but ownership has been equalized. This program has already been carried out in most of the country, and the Communists plan by the end of this year to have completed the process in all parts of China except for a few relatively small areas. But this is admitted to be merely a tactical move, and the Chinese Communists have already outlined a step-by-step process of agricultural collectivization, proceeding from mutual aid teams to agricultural producers cooperatives to collective farms. The Communists believe collectivization will make possible the increased agricultural production necessary for industrialization. But there is reason to question the degree to which collectivization and mechanization can be applied in China, and collectivization alone will not overcome China's basic shortage of land. In addition, peasant resistance to collectivization can be expected when the process is further advanced.

Until 1949, the Chinese Communists, for tactical reasons, concentrated their efforts on rural China. Now, however, having moved the "center of the revolution" to the cities, they are concentrating on their aim of industrialization.

Industrialization and the development of modern urban proletariat are considered by the Communists to be essential prerequisites for Communism. During the past three years, they have attempted to "restore industry" to prewar levels, and they have carried out a few major public works in the fields of transportation and water conservancy. Now they proclaim their readiness to embark upon large-scale industrial development, and they have begun to devote increasing percentages of growing national budgets to capital investments. Here again, however, fundamental questions are raised. China today is much less industrialized than the Soviet Union was in 1917 and possesses greatly inferior raw material resources. The Chinese Communists want to turn the country into a strong industrial state as rapidly as possible, but there are many obstacles to rapid industrialization. One of the most serious is the lack of capital equipment. China must inevitably depend upon foreign sources of capital equipment during the initial stages of industrialization, and most of the possible sources are cut off at present. It is a moot point how much the Soviet bloc can, or is willing to, provide. Furthermore, experts who have analyzed China's industrial potential in terms of raw materials generally assert that only moderate industrialization is possible under the best of conditions. China has plenty of coal, about 240 billion tons of known reserves, but its iron resources of about 1.5 to 20 billion tons are not impressive. China is believed to be seriously short of oil; known resources, including oil shale, total only slightly over 700 million tons, China has a large hydroelectric potential, but it is

undeveloped. China is, in fact, in every way an undeveloped country in industrial terms, and it is not well-endowed for future industrialization. The Chinese **Communists** seem determined, **however**, to accomplish what they can through organization and sheer **will** power,

In regard to the process of industrialization, the **theory** of "New Democracy" asserts that private enterprise and cooperatives **are to** be tolerated for a considerable period, under "**the** leadership of state **enterprise.**" Actually, however, the Chinese Communists have moved ahead so rapidly in **expanding** state enterprises and establishing state controls that private enterprise has lost much, if not **most**, of its independence. At the same time, the bourgeoisie has been bitterly attacked as a **group** exerting a subversive influence on the regime. Under these conditions, little initiative can be expected from private enterprise, and a greater burden must necessarily fall **upon** the state. **This may** force the Chinese **Communists** to **socialize** the urban economy at a pace faster than their planning calls for.

The social revolution **which** the Chinese Communists are **carrying** out aims at changing the entire pattern of Chinese **life** and structure of Chinese society. The aim is a "**new culture**". They have first concentrated on attacking and destroying the old, then on building something **new**, and the changes **already accomplished**, although difficult to assess accurately, **are tremendous**. The **family** is one of the prime targets of attack, and there is no doubt that its role Chinese society is being slowly undermined. In place of family loyalty the **Communists demand** loyalty to the party and the state. The class structure has also been modified **considerably** by the **violent** shock treatment of **class** warfare. The landlords have been "**eliminated** as a class" by confiscation of their **land**. The bourgeoisie has been **stripped** of much of its **power** and **influence**. The modern intelligentsia has been **steadily** subordinated to the state. The **prestige** of the urban proletariat has **been** elevated, even though no **substantial** change has taken place in the **workers'** economic status. **Women** have emerged, or in **some** cases been forced, **into** a **new** and active social role,

The **Communists**, in short, are breaking down past relationships and associations, and **are hammering** out a new proletarianized society. **They are** also attempting to force **everyone** to be **politically** conscious, to take an active part in collective public life, and to fit **into** a **new** scheme of social organization in groups controlled and directed by the **Communist Party**,

In the ideological field, the **Communists** are trying to root out most of the Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist and other traditional **ideas**, as well as modern liberal ideas **imported** from the West, and **are trying** to substitute their **own ideas**, values, and **morality**, stressing loyalty to the **Communist Party**, the **dogmas** of **Marxism-Leninism**, and the "**thought** of Mo Tse-tung". Although it is **particularly** hard to judge the permanency of their **accomplishments** in this field, they are **carrying** out one of the most energetic and ambitious programs of **mass** indoctrination, propaganda, and thought control in history, and the effects **are already considerable**. **Some** sort of amalgam of old and new ideas **may eventually** result, but the old ideas **are now** in disrepute. It is difficult to judge, however, the **extent** to **which** they would **reemerge** if the **present** fanaticism cools and pressures to conform to the **new standards** are relaxed.

From an international **point** of view, one of the most **significant** results of **Communist** rule in China is the **emergence** of a new military-political power, hostile to the West and closely aligned with the Soviet bloc. The Chinese **Communists** have built the strongest **army** in Chinese **history**, with an estimated four to five million disciplined soldiers. This is basically an infantry **army**, but it is capable of operating effectively on the **mainland** of Asia. China is now fighting United Nations forces in Korea, occupying Tibet, and aiding the Viet Minh in **Indo-China** without, apparently, seriously depleting the troops **required** for home defence and internal security. This **army** is a new and disturbing **factor** in international politics, **even though** it obviously has serious material problems and **limitations**.

Not **only** has China under Communist rule developed a new **army**, it has **also** gained a new prestige among certain (not **all**) **groups** in Asia. **Many** **nationalistic** Asians are **more** impressed by **Communist** China's strength and dynamism than by its totalitarian police-state methods of rule. **China** **also** **exhibits** a **more** extroverted world outlook than at **any time** in recent history, and it **frankly proclaims** its sense of revolutionary mission in Asia. After **approximately** one hundred years during which the West has tended to look upon China as a power vacuum, **China** has now **become** a **dynamic** factor in international affairs. It has become a weight **up-setting** the balance of power, a leader of **Communist** revolution in Asia, and a threat to the **Far Eastern** policy **aims** of the United States and other non-Communist world **powers**.

This new Chinese Communist regime cannot be ignored. There is a need to study its strength and its weaknesses, **its** present policies and **what** they hold for the **future**, its effects upon **people** in **China** and its influence on Asia.

The bulk of evidence filtering **from** the **mainland** of **China** indicates that, after less than three **years** of rule, the **Chinese Communists** by their violence and totalitarian methods have lost **much** of the voluntary support of ordinary people, other than those actually helping them to exercise **power**. The **evidence also indicates**, however, that despite increasing **unpopularity**, the Chinese Communist regime is strong, and has firm control of the country.

All of these factors **must** be studied to assess the role of China in the present international scene and to determine sound policies to fit the situation which has been created by the rise to power of a strong, totalitarian, Communist regime in **China**.

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