CHAPTER 29
The Winning Over of the Big Warlords: Feng and Yen

COURTSHIP OF FENG YÜ-HSIANG

Feng had long-standing personal ties with several leading KMT members. In 1925, both Feng and Canton were supported by Russia whose ancient passion for the East was reemerging through her efforts to increase her influence in as many parts of China as possible. The Soviet Union also could rationalize these efforts as a means of attacking world capitalism and imperialism through the markets of China. Since Canton's KMT was in no position, either economically or geographically, to provide him with needed aid in 1925, Feng remained ambivalent in his attitude toward the National Revolutionary Base, although Russia did encourage their cooperation. [1] They did have in common a set of enemies—various warlords in Central and North China—and sharing no contiguous territory they had, as yet, no conflict of interests. In early 1926, the KMT began the practice of assigning men to keep open channels of communication and to establish cooperation between Canton and Feng's Kuominchün.

Influenced by many political concepts and poorly indoctrinated in the classics, Feng, the "Christian General," spoke in March 1926 of being part of a movement to realize the principles of Sun Yat-sen. [2] He had, during his prior control of Peking, been unusually permissive toward the various KMT movements active there. [3] Other motives probably outweighed ideology in March 1926 when he suffered successive defeats in Honan and Hopei. [4] This was followed in April by his retreat from Peking, and then in July from Nan-k'ou—the last pass from which one could look down on the North China Plain. [5] Following his loss in North China, a more compliant Feng traveled

to Moscow to observe Russia's progress and also sent representatives to Canton to show his willingness (or desperation) to cooperate. [6]

To present his conditions for cooperation with the NRA, Feng sent to Canton the man who had provided liaison with the KMT, Hsü Ch'ien. [7] Hsü traveled to Canton via Shanghai, and on August 25, 1926, he presented Feng's views to the National Government Committee. Feng's submission included: the employment of the KMT's system of Party Representatives in his Kuominchün, the adoption of the KMT flag, the incorporation of the Kuominchün in the NRA, and the establishment in Canton of a liaison office. Much of this settlement was nominal in nature. Feng had some of his own reliables appointed as Party Representatives to his units, and his military organization, or chain of command, was not to be restructured until *after* the completion of the expedition. [8]

Along with his continued aid from Russia, [9] Feng received from allied Canton the appointments of military councilman, National Government committeeman, and the title of Party Representative to his own Kuominchün. [10] Returning from Russia to his mountain bastion of Shensi in September 1926, Feng was met by a KMT member who had been transferred from Shanghai to advise Feng in political matters. [11] This man was Yü Yu-jen, a native of Sanyuan, Shensi, an imperial degree holder, and considered a KMT intellectual for his calligraphy, and for his years in the presidency of Shanghai University in the 1920s. Yü had demonstrated his activism by founding several modern newspapers and by his recruitment of young revolutionaries and warlord defectors. Other KMT members assigned to communicate with Feng in late 1926 were Li Lieh-chün, Niu Yung-chien, and Huang Fu—associates of the Shanghai KMT. From mid-1926 to early 1927 Feng regrouped and recouped in the safety of Shensi. In September 1926, Feng joined the KMT. [12]

By December 11, 1926, when Feng moved his troops east from Shensi's T'ung-kuan Pass and entered Honan against the Manchurian Clique, Feng had already reached an agreement with Chiang Kai-shek to act as the commander of the Center Route of the Northern Expedition. [13] Upon reaching the agreement, the KMT sent a political expert from the NRA General Political Department to advise Feng and to head the proposed Political Department for the Kuominchün. Although Feng already enjoyed the services of a number of Russian advisors supervising the receipt of Russian aid, in December the CCP sent its agents as well. [14]

As the KMT moved deeper into polarized disintegration, Feng's attitude became ambiguous; during the spring of 1927 his attitude was that of watching and awaiting the opportunities offered on each side. The Mandate of Heaven would go to whichever faction was successful—pragmatic Chinese peasants like Feng do not knowingly back losers. Feng was in a good position with over 100,000 well-trained, battle-hardened troops in westernmost Honan, a strategic position to support an attack on North China, whether from Wuhan or Nanking.

Thus, during that spring of the Party split, Wuhan and Nanking wooed Feng with great ardor (and the granting of many titles). On April 6, Wuhan, where Feng's liaison man Hsü Ch'ien had been patronized, appointed Feng to the position of C-in-C of the Second Collective Army. [15] As Feng and Wuhan pressed their attack on Chang Tso-lin's forces in Honan, Feng appeared to be cooperating. But when the province was taken and Wuhan's badly mauled forces rested near exhaustion, Feng decided that he, rather than Wuhan, should administer the province of Honan. With the capture of Honan, Feng had access to Nanking's aid via the Lung-Hai Railroad. After hearing Wuhan's offerings at Ch'engchou, Honan, Feng traveled to Hsüchou, Kiangsu, to negotiate with Chiang and Nanking leaders on June 19, 1927.

Nanking could afford to be optimistic on several counts. Wuhan, with its economy crippled by the CCP's union movement, could offer Feng little but competition over authority in Honan. By this time many of Feng's old friends in the KMT had sided with Nanking where finances were in good enough shape to aid Feng with materiel and silver that could now be shipped via the Lung-Hai Railroad. Neighboring warlord Yen Hsi-shan also argued on Nanking's behalf with Feng. [16]

By Feng's second day of discussions at Hsüchou, he had decided to accept Chiang's "ideas," which were much more tangible than Wuhan's: the promise of war materiel and financial aid. Feng and Chiang issued a joint telegram stating that their armies would, together, finish the revolution against the imperialists. [17] National reunification was practically the sole ideological link holding together the proliferating National Revolution—although Feng had come to share with Chiang a reaction against the Communists. On June 21, Feng also wired Wang Ching-wei that he considered the CCP a threat to the National Revolution and that therefore Wuhan should exile Borodin and Teng Yen-ta to Russia. [18] As Feng resumed his offensive against

Chang Tso-lin in early July 1927, he directed a purge from his ranks of Wuhan appointees (mainly Chinese Communists in the Political Department). [19]

On July 7, upon the resumption of Feng's campaign in eastern Honan, Nanking appointed Feng to its reorganized Military Council, and on the eighteenth the National Government made good Chiang's promise by voting support to Feng's army by the monthly sum of C$2 million. [20] As his offensive continued, Feng wired quickly his acceptance of the aid. [21] For Nanking, Feng's new dependence on aid, now that he had broken with Russia, meant that he would be forced to keep open the arterial railroad link with Nanking—the Lung-Hai Railroad. In particular, Feng would have to cooperate in defending the rail crossing at Hsüchou, Kiangsu, from northern counteroffensives. Once lost to the NRA in mid-1927, Hsüchou remained the focal point of Feng's military pressure—thus helping the NRA as it fought a desperate defense in southern Kiangsu in August. In this manner, Feng's pressure on the Ankuochün flank in Honan diverted strength from Sun Ch'uan-fang's last attempt to retake southeastern China. That same pressure aided the NRA as it fought its way back through Kiangsu during November and December 1927 to retake Hsüchou (for the third time in 1927). Although Feng's political submission to Nanking proved to be nominal, he was a valuable *military* asset to the Northern Expedition. Without his cooperation during the last phase of the expedition in 1928, the campaign to take Peking would have lasted much longer or perhaps would have failed.

THE WOOING OF YEN HSI-SHAN, THE MODEL GOVERNOR

Another of the big warlords of North China to *kuei-fu* to the National Revolution and thus provide vital military support was Yen Hsi-shan. His rise as the ruler of mountainous Shansi went back before 1909, when he had become acquainted with the first generation of KMT members through his ties with the T'ung-meng hui. His military studies in Japan between 1904 and 1909 had provided him contacts with nationalism, new political techniques, and the modern-educated Chinese students there—many of whom later joined the KMT. [22] His subordinate, Shang Chen, who had long been a KMT member, [23] kept him aware of the wisdom of the Three People's Principles as well as the value of the KMT's military and financial power by late

1926. Yen, Feng, and the NRA shared a mutual enemy in Chang Tso-lin with his Manchurian army poised across North China. Yen's provincial defense differed from that of Feng in the northwest in that Yen had not taken his troops outside the protective border mountains of his fortress province. While Yen did not dash out into the contest for North China, he, nevertheless, had to defend himself against the giant Manchurian army.

On December 1, 1926, Yen's representative arrived at NRA headquarters to express Yen's interest in the National Revolution, which by that time had been victorious over Wu P'ei-fu in Hunan and Hupei, and against Sun Ch'uan-fang in Kiangsi and Fukien. [24] However, on December 20, Yen also accepted tactfully Chang Tso-lin's appointment as a vice-director of the Ankuochün—since the NRA was still far from North China and Chang Tso-lin, across Shansi's border, had to be kept at bay. [25] The following week, Yen's representative again called on Chiang [26] and presumably communications continued throughout early 1927. Located in pivotal Shansi province, which loomed above the invasion corridor of the North China Plain, Yen with his 100,000 troops had much to offer the National Revolution. From Yen's northern border with Hopei, he could concentrate troops less than 150 miles from Peking.

After the KMT split there was the same contention for the affections of Yen as have already been noted for Feng. On April 22, 1927, Wuhan's Military Council appointed Yen the C-in-C of the Third Collective Army (his own Shansi Army), just as Feng had earlier been legitimized as the C-in-C of his own Second Collective Army. [27] However, Yen leaned toward the faction at wealthy Shanghai, and so, on April 8, two days after Feng had been appointed by Wuhan to head the Second CA, Yen issued a declaration ordering his troops to follow the Three People's Principles *and* to be vigilant against disorders promoted by the CCP—thus siding with the anti-Communists. [28] Perhaps due to Chiang Kai-shek's reverses in Kiangsu, Yen's declaration was suddenly canceled the following day, April 9, 1927, and he instituted instead martial law. [29] The nearby presence of the Manchurian giant had again forced Yen to back down from a public acceptance of the revolutionary banner.

By early June 1927, at the time of the first Japanese intervention in Shantung, Yen clarified his relationship with the KMT by flying the Party flag at his provincial capital, T'aiyüan, and by renaming his army the National Revolutionary Army. A June 6 mass meeting at T'aiyüan celebrated Yen's acceptance of Nanking's title of committee chairman of the Northern Route

Army of the NRA. The title was one that had been offered Yen's representative earlier in December 1926 at a meeting at Nanchang, Kiangsi. [30] However, since the NRA was not within range to aid Yen, he had to placate Chang Tso-lin with the pledge that he would not invade Ankuochün territory. Yen's public fence-straddling in North China during June 1927 included his efforts to mediate between the KMT and Chang Tso-lin, a stance he maintained for the remainder of the summer.

On July 7, 1927, Nanking's Military Council made Yen a member, and the following day Chiang sent an ex-lieutenant of Sun Ch'uan-fang from Kiangsi to pressure Yen. Fang Pen-jen, who knew the benefits to be derived from defecting, discussed with Yen the details of cooperation with Nanking. [31] At that time Nanking urged both Yen and Feng to collaborate in attacking Chang Tso-lin through Hopei and Chahar. However, they were too jittery over the prospect that the other might occupy Peking and no action ensued. All they had in common was their enemy, Chang, in Peking, and straining their efforts at cooperation was their mutual desire for the territory of Hopei and Peking. However, Chang Tso-lin helped drive them together when, in late August 1927, he attacked Yen at Shih-chia-chuang and Feng in northern Honan. As Yen retreated back into Shansi in late September he became more willing to consider a coordinated campaign against the Manchurians.

At that point Yen wired Nanking his oath of battle against Chang Tso-lin and began to counterattack north along the Peking-Suiyüan Railroad. [32] By early October 1927, Yen was definitely committed against Chang Tso-lin as he fought him on two fronts, thereby lending support to Nanking's campaign to the south in Kiangsu. Chang Tso-lin was too distracted by Yen and Feng in North China to risk reinforcing Sun Ch'uan-fang in Kiangsu. Then during the final phase of the expedition in the spring of 1928, Yen's two-pronged attack out of Shansi was incalculably important in flanking the western end of the Peking-Tientsin line. In 1927 and 1928, it was definitely better for the NRA to have Yen and Feng as cooperative military allies than to have to face them as enemies.

It must be granted that both Feng and Yen provided invaluable military support to the Northern Expedition. There might have been no reunification of China had it not been for the inclusion of warlords of their breed. Unfortunately, the military conquest was only the first phase of the centralization that Nanking desired, just as had been the case with all Chinese regimes in their founding. While the expedition was in progress

the allied warlords and the Party all stood to profit from the neutralization of Chang Tso-lin's power in North China. But, with the removal of Chang Tso-lin and his clique, Yen and Feng wanted to enjoy the privilege of having the last word in their respective territories, within some loose federation of autonomous provinces. Real subordination to the KMT at Nanking had no appeal. Neither Feng nor Yen had professed any devotion to Sun Yat-sen during the Party's *lean* days at Canton. Feng had begun to show interest during his desperate retreat from Hopei into the bleakness of Inner Mongolia, and pledged his support to Chiang only after Nanking proved able to deliver substantial aid. Yen Hsi-shan, more secure in the mountain fastness of Shansi, showed overt interest in the KMT's movement only *after* the NRA's victories in South China. Thus, the KMT policy of rallying beneath its flag any willing sources of military power was initially necessary and effective, but it also helped to weaken Nanking politically because of the ambiguous motivations of those it attracted. As with earlier Chinese regimes, after the tremendous task of pulling a disintegrated China back into a whole, there still remained the equally trying chore of consolidation of central power. The KMT's successors in the 1960s were still wrestling with "odd bedfellows" whom they had drawn into their movement during their rise in the 1930s and 1940s. Vast landed states, such as China, seem to be plagued by factionalism, by a lack of consensus, since, in order to pull them into a single entity, a heterogeneous base is demanded. Just as with the large extended Chinese family, harmony was the much sought after, but elusive, political ideal.