

An Unsuccessful Mission:  
The Short-Lived Alliance of the Soviet Union with Warlord Feng Yuxiang, 1925-1927

by

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BA, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 2011

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

This Master's thesis examines the reasons for the failure of the Soviet advisers' mission in Chinese warlord Feng Yuxiang's army in 1925-1927. The USSR had strategic interests in Northern China and needed an ally to help it promote them. Soviet leadership chose prominent Chinese political and military leader Feng Yuxiang as one of its main allies in Northern China and sent advisers to help him strengthen and indoctrinate his army. This mission's goals were to establish close relations with Feng and his officers, to influence the organizational and military planning of his army and to promote Soviet nationalist and ideological interests. However, the Soviet advisers did not succeed. This thesis focuses on the three main reasons of the mission's failure: the advisers' group's political, ideological and internal problems. Chapter I examines Soviet strategic interests in North China as well as reasons for Soviet-Feng alliance. Chapter II discusses the conflicts between Feng and advisers that were caused by differences in their political views, strategic interests and plans for China's future. It also focuses on the ideological differences between Feng and the Soviet advisers, including Feng's disapproval of the communist ideology and the advisers' disapproval of Feng's use of Christianity to improve the discipline in his army. Finally, Chapter III discusses a factor that has long been neglected in other studies: the group's internal problems. Indeed, insufficient preparation of the mission caused communicational and cultural issues on a personal level between the advisers and Feng Yuxiang's officers. This thesis brings together information from previous works and uses rare documents from the Communist International archives. Declassified advisers' reports and letters, in combination with personal memoirs of the survived advisers, allow the study to research this topic in a new, more personal perspective.

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## Introduction

After the Republican Revolution of 1911, the new Republic of China soon entered the Warlord Period in 1916-1928. In absence of a strong central government, commanders of military cliques came to power and began a bloody internal struggle for the absolute supremacy in the country. Continuous military conflicts plunged the country into chaos, thousands of innocent people died, and the economy was totally undermined.<sup>1</sup> In this hopeless time help came from an unexpected quarter: another young country that had recently been in a similar situation lent a helping hand. The Soviet Union, where the violent Civil War had just ended, decided to offer any possibly revolutionary Chinese factions military and financial assistance. Consequently, a short-lived alliance formed between the Soviet Union and a Chinese warlord, Feng Yuxiang in 1925-27.<sup>2</sup>

Since the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union had strategic interest in China. Beside its motive to spread communist revolution to the world's most populated country, the USSR also had a more pragmatic goal – to protect its national interests through Soviet-Sino alliance. In particular, the Soviet Union needed an ally in East Asia to protect Soviet borders from its rival, Japan, and to promote Soviet influence in Manchuria, where the USSR had significant strategic and economic interest.<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of the 1920s Soviet Russia had started searching for an ally that would help it to pursue the aforementioned goals.

The Soviet government formed an alliance with the revolutionary government of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in Canton as early as 1923, but it still needed an ally in Northern China to deal with Japan and the pro-Japanese Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin. After Feng Yuxiang overthrew the Beijing government in 1924 and became a powerful figure in Chinese politics, the Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993), 311.

<sup>2</sup> Leong, Sow-Theng, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1926* (Canberra, ACT: Australian National University Press 1976), xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

Union started considering him as a new potential ally.<sup>4</sup> For Feng, the alliance with the USSR was the only way to receive urgently needed armaments and funds. Thus, both sides had pragmatic reasons for cooperation and in 1925 the USSR sent a group of military and political advisers to the army of Feng Yuxiang in an attempt to promote Soviet influence and strengthen Feng's military and political position in China.

This group of Soviet advisers arrived in Kalgan, where Feng Yuxiang's National Peoples' Army headquarters were located, in April 1925. The group was supervised by the military attaché in Beijing (first Anatoly Gekker, and then Nikolay Voronin from June 1925). Initially the group consisted of twenty-nine military instructors, two political advisers, one physician, and four translators. In September, the group had thirty-five advisers. In February 1926, it had thirty-six advisers, but in March 1926 this number had decreased to twenty-seven. The first head of the Kalgan group was a Soviet general of Lithuanian origin, Vitovt Putna, who was replaced in May 1925 by Vitaly Primakov, one of the founders of the Red Army in Ukraine. In May 1926, Feng Yuxiang went to the USSR for several months. During that period most advisers from the Kalgan group were sent to Guangzhou, and Primakov was appointed Soviet military attaché in Afghanistan and replaced by Mikhail Sangursky on the post of the Feng's military advisers. Sangursky held this post until the mission was recalled in July 1927.<sup>5</sup> This thesis mainly discusses why the Soviet mission failed and its implication for long-term Sino-Russian relations.

Previous studies of the Soviet advisers in the Chinese political and military history in 1920s have often focused on these in Sun Yat-sen's Canton government based in Southern China. Soviet advisers in the army of Feng Yuxiang are mentioned only in the context of the Soviet relations with Sun's Nationalist Party (KMT, Kuomintang or Guomindang). There are only few academic works dedicated to the Soviet-Feng relations.

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<sup>4</sup> Yang Qi, "Da gemin shiqi Guomongjun yu Sulian guanxi xintan" (New research on the relations between Nationalist Armies and the USSR during the Great Revolution in China), *Anhui Lishi*, no. 4 (1999): 71.

<sup>5</sup> Viktor Usov, *Sovietskaya Razvedka v Kitaye: 20-e godyi XX veka* (Soviet Intelligence in China in the 1920s), (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 230.

The most significant work is *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927* by Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How. This research has two main subjects: the roles of the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, Zhongguo gongchangdang) in the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s and the attempts of Soviet Russia and its emissaries to guide this revolution. The authors mainly focus on the relations between the USSR, the KMT and the CCP, but they also pay attention to the Soviet advisers, who were promoting Soviet influence and spreading communist ideas in China and who were called “the missionaries of the revolution” by Wilburn and How. The book uses rich material about the activities and life of Soviet advisers in China, mainly in the South. However, only some pages mention the group of advisers in the army of Feng Yuxiang and provide very interesting details about their work. One of the main sources of this research is the documents from the Soviet Embassy in Beijing that were seized in a 1927 police raid. The authors examined these documents carefully and verified them against other contemporary sources. *Missionaries of Revolution*<sup>6</sup> is an excellent source of information about the mission of Soviet advisers and the activities of different groups of advisers, especially those in southern China.

Even this outstanding work is unable to use rare documents from the Communist International archives that reflect the previously downplayed sides of the advisers’ work in Feng’s army. “Kollektsiya dokumentov o deyatelnosti sovetskikh diplomatov, voennikh i politicheskikh sovetnikov v Kitaye” (Collection of documents on activities of Soviet diplomats, military and political advisors in China)<sup>7</sup> from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RSASPH), Moscow, Russia, contains hundreds of declassified documents on activities of Soviet diplomats, military and political advisors in China. It consists of the advisers’ staff documents, reports on their activities, situation in Feng Yuxiang’s army and in the advisers’

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<sup>6</sup> Wilbur Martin C. and Julie Lien-ying How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989);

<sup>7</sup> “Kollektsiya dokumentov po istorii revolyutsii v Kitaye (1922-1926) (Collection of documents on the history of the revolution in China (1922-1926))”, Collection 627 “Collection of documents on activities of Soviet diplomats, military and political advisors in China”, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RSASPH), Moscow, Russia.

groups, private and official letters, orders and advisers' plans for their military and political work. These documents allow us to have an understanding of the inner structure of the group, its real goals in Feng's army and firsthand opinions on the group's working conditions and progress.

Declassified advisers' reports and letters, in combination with personal memoirs of survived advisers, allow the study to research this topic in a new, more personal perspective. Memoirs of Vitaly Primakov, Vera Vishniyakova-Akimova and Alexander Blagodatov,<sup>8</sup> the Soviet advisers to Feng Yuxiang are invaluable sources of information about their activities in Feng's army. Vitaly Primakov was the Chief Advisers in charge of this group, which is why his memoirs are especially valuable. Primakov's *Volunteer's Diaries* is a very important book for understanding the relations between Feng Yuxiang, his officers and Soviet advisers, the organization of the group, its work in Feng's armies and general situation in the army. It has an abundance of information about the organization of military schools in Kalgan and training of Feng's officers in the Soviet Union. Another very important autobiography is Feng Yuxiang's autobiography, *Wo de Shenghuo* (My life).<sup>9</sup> Despite Feng barely mentioned the presence of the Soviet advisers in his army and the Soviet help in general, his autobiography provides a wide variety of information about his political views, ideology and his relations with the USSR and communism. One of the most informative biographies featuring Feng is *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* by J. E. Sheridan,<sup>10</sup> the first major work on Chinese warlordism by a Western scholar. In this book Sheridan examines Feng's career and how his actions influenced the political history of China. This work gives us information about relations between Feng Yuxiang and the different warlords in China and the various foreign and Chinese politicians.

The most significant Western works about warlordism in China that were used in my thesis are Ch'i Hsi-sheng, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* and Edward Mccord's *Power of a*

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<sup>8</sup> Alexey Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitayskoy revolyutsii 1925-1927* (Notes about Chinese revolution, 1925-1927) (Moscow: Nauka, 1979); Vitaly Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera* (Volunteer's Diaries) (Moscow: Nauka, 1967); Vera Vishniyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China. 1925-1927* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Feng, Yuxiang, *Wo de Shenghuo* (My Life) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> James E. Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966).



*Gun*.<sup>11</sup> In *Warlord Politics in China* Chi Hsi-sheng gives information about the military factions in China, their composition, military capabilities, weaponry and tactics, their economic capabilities and their military politics. It is an enormous source of information about Feng Yuxiang and his armies, the battles they took part in and their relations with other warlords; it also contains very useful maps and tables. I consider *Warlord Politics in China* as one of the major sources of information about Feng's politics and the political situation in China in 1925-1927.

Edward McCord's *The Power of a Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* provides information on the formation of the warlord cliques and regimes after the 1911 Revolution. The author investigates the emergence of warlord rule, and its political and social aspects. There is some useful information on Feng Yuxiang's way to become an important force in China, and his career before the Beijing coup in 1924.

Another group of sources focus on the Soviet-Chinese relations and Soviet policy in China in the 1920s. *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* by Dan Jacobs gives a detailed description of the life and work of Borodin, the main Soviet adviser in southern China.<sup>12</sup> It also includes a lot of information about other advisers in China, their relations with each other and with Chiang Kai-shek, Feng Yuxiang and other military leaders of modern China. Sow-Theng Leong in *Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations, 1917-1926*,<sup>13</sup> provides a general understanding of the aims of the Soviet diplomacy in China and the relations of the USSR government with the Chinese government in Beijing. This book examines the motivation of the Soviet government in its policy towards China and general historical background of that period, but its discussion about the Soviet-Feng relations is limited.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Warlord politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Jacobs, Dan, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Leong, Sow-Theng, *Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations, 1917-1926* (Canberra, ACT : Australian National University Press, 1976).

Based on the aforesaid sources, this research focuses on the period from 1925, right after Feng launched the Beijing coup and became a target in the Soviet's mission in China, until 1927, when Feng allied with Chang Kai-shek and terminated cooperation with the USSR. After a successful military coup in October 1924, Feng Yuxiang seized Beijing, the entire metropolitan province Zhili and Inner Mongolia. After the Beijing coup Feng Yuxiang found himself in difficult situation: his territories had almost no arsenals, and the United States, Great Britain and Japan refused to supply arms to his army. In this situation there was no other way to get weapons and ammunition, but to seek the help of the Soviet Union. In the beginning of 1925, the commanders of Feng's Peoples' Armies appealed to the Soviet leadership for any possible help. The Politburo of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) agreed to supply the KMT and all "Chinese troops supporting the revolution" with weapons of the latest Soviet model and send to the southern and northern armies the most experienced military advisers.<sup>14</sup> The National People's Armies lost the attention of the Soviet Union after the Tianjin operation in the end of 1926: although the supply of arms continued, military advisers were sent to the South to assist the more promising revolutionary armies of the Chinese Nationalist Party. After that Feng Yuxiang had no choice, but to join the victorious National Revolutionary Army, and the National People's Armies as independent forces virtually ceased to exist.<sup>15</sup>

Soviet mission in KMT (Kuomintang) arrived in Canton in June 1924, and its goals were to help reorganize KMT into effective leadership organ and to reorganize, train and indoctrinate military forces that would help KMT to unify China. Through their military and political help, advisers were supposed to increase Soviet influence on KMT, to bring China into the "world revolution", and to promote Soviet strategic goals. They were quite successful in achieving the goals. KMT was successfully reorganized, the NRA, the military force of KMT, was victorious in the Northern Expedition, and, most important, Soviet advisors virtually held most important

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<sup>14</sup> Sergey, Aleksandrov, "The Help of the Soviet Union to the People's Armies in 1925-1927," *Problems of the Far East*, no. 3 (June, 2008): 134.

<sup>15</sup> Yuri Chudodееv, ed., *On the Chinese land: Memoirs of the Soviet Volunteers, 1925-1945* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), 5.

positions in the NRA. That was the success that the Soviet mission in Feng's army failed to achieve. But despite its achievements, Soviet mission in the South was also cancelled after the Soviet-KMT split in 1927.<sup>16</sup>

In my research I want to focus on the three main reasons that led to the mission's failure: political, ideological and internal problems of the advisers' group. Chapter I will examine contradictions between the Soviet policy in China and Feng's political views that obstructed their cooperation; Chapter II will examine ideological differences between the two allies; and, finally, Chapter III will analyze internal problems of the advisers' group that led to its failure, such as lack of proper organization of the group's work, interpersonal problems between the group's members, and any cultural problems, such as cultural shock and lack of any knowledge about China on advisers' side. In the thesis, while discussing political problems, I am using the term "political" in a more general sense, meaning a combination of political and ideological interests and actions.

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<sup>16</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of revolution*, 9, 249.

## Chapter One

### **Soviet Mission in North China and the USSR's Turn to Feng Yuxiang's Army**

East Asia was always a very important region for Soviet Russia's international politics since its rise from the October Revolution of 1917. Even though the region was very far from the European part of Russia and its political center, Moscow, some of the most important events of the Civil War happened in the Russian Far East, near East Asian countries, including China and the Japanese Empire that had formally colonized Korea in 1910. The decisive battles of the Red Army with the White troops took place in Siberia, and the war on the Russian Far East was not finished until 1922, when the Red Army captured Vladivostok, the largest Russian port on the Pacific Ocean. During and after the Civil War, the Soviet Union paid special attention to China. Not merely for the Leninist strategy of promoting global communism through alliance with bourgeois forces, but also for its practical concern over national interests.<sup>17</sup> In fact, in the Soviet's relations with different political powers in North China, its nationalistic concern clearly outweighed its ideological consideration. Those were the main reasons for the Soviet contacts with a few warlords of North China, and its mission finally turned to General Feng Yuxiang's army located there.

#### *The Soviet Strategic Interests in North China*

After the October Revolution broke out in Russia in 1917, Japanese participation in the Allied Powers' intervention made Japan the main rival of the Soviet Russia on the East. Feeling the threat to its national interests, the Soviet government sought various means to ensure the security of its Eastern borders and to consolidate its positions in East Asia. The Soviet Union naturally considered expansion of its influence in China as the key step for achieving its goals. Soviet Russia and China had a long border, and both faced the threat from the Japanese Empire.

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<sup>17</sup> Blaine R. Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010), 109.

Thus, the Soviet government needed to keep China both as a friendly neighbor and as an ally against the Japanese imperialism. It actively pursued such nationalistic interests in China, including the special rights inherited from the Russian Empire, by sending missions there starting from the early 1920s.

In the First World War, because the Eastern Front of the Allied powers collapsed after the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, the Allies decided to start an intervention into Soviet Russia, and Japan played an especially aggressive role in this military action.<sup>18</sup> In August 1918, the joint forces of these Western powers, including Japan, entered Vladivostok, and by October had secured control over Russian Maritime Province and a part of Siberia. Even after the military forces of the United States, Great Britain and other Allied powers withdrew from the anti-Soviet war by 1920, the Japanese army continued to occupy Russian territories, and supported the White Armies in their struggles against the Bolsheviks. It was not until 1922 that the Vladivostok-based Provisional Priamurye Government, the last enclave of the White Army patronized by Japan, was defeated by the Red Army. At the same time, international and domestic pressure forced the Japanese government to withdraw its troops from Russian territories. However, the northern part of Sakhalin Island was still under the Japanese control until 1925.<sup>19</sup>

Soviet Russia was very cautious about its relations with Japan and conscious of Japan's threat from the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Despite the victory in the Civil War, the Red Army tried to avoid any possible conflicts with the Japanese army during the latter's intervention and evacuation from Siberia. After the Japanese troops withdrew from Trans-Baikal and Amur regions in 1920, the Far Eastern Republic was formed on these territories with the help of the Soviet Government. The new state was nominally independent, but in fact was controlled by Moscow. The Soviet leaders saw it as a buffer zone between Soviet

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<sup>18</sup> Paul E. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: A Great Disobedience against the People* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 68.

<sup>19</sup> Paul W. Behringer, "'Forewarned Is Forearmed': Intelligence, Japan's Siberian Intervention, and the Washington Conference," *International History Review* 38, no. 3 (June 2016): 384.

Russia and the territories occupied by Japan, and used it to prevent direct confrontation with the latter. They also continued to put pressure on Japan to evacuate the Russian Far East by playing on her rivalry with America for domination of the Asia-Pacific.<sup>20</sup> Lenin and other Soviet leaders did not want to control the region directly as they feared that the Allied interventionist forces might have regarded such actions as provocation, which could lead to further attack on Russia. The young Soviet could not afford to take the risk because there were approximately 72,000 Japanese troops in Siberia and North Manchuria.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Japanese presence on the Russian Far East severely restricted Soviet policy in the Pacific region,<sup>22</sup> and the Soviet government was desperately looking for means to retrieve former lands of Russian Empire and regain influence in East Asia, especially China. Thus, rivalry with Japan also affected the policy of Soviet Russia in North China.

Soviet Russia had strategic interest in China, including its attempts to inherit the legacies of the Russian Empire there. To break diplomatic isolation, Soviet Russia made attempts to establish official relationships with China as early as 1919. It issued the Karakhan Manifesto, which promised to relinquish all special rights in China that had been prescribed by the unequal treaties between the Russian Empire and the Qing dynasty. The main purpose for the Soviet government to make such a generous offer was to convince the Beijing government to start diplomatic negotiations with isolated Soviet Russia. This aim was achieved by 1921, but thereafter the Soviet Russia changed the conditions of the manifesto, in fact withdrawing the promise.<sup>23</sup>

Soviet Russia desired to achieve control over the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in competition with the Japanese force in Manchuria. The CER was not merely a means of

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<sup>20</sup> Dukes Paul and Cathryn Brennan, "The Uninvited Guest: Soviet Russia, the Far Eastern Republic and the Washington Conference. November 1921 to February 1922." *Sibirica: Journal of Siberian Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 2002): 157.

<sup>21</sup> Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas E. Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia, 1911-1921* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, 1980), 221.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924-1925," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 462.

transportation, but also had significant political importance as it allowed economic penetration into Northern Manchuria and increased Russian military presence in the region.<sup>24</sup> The railway was built at the beginning of the twentieth century on Chinese land under Russian dominance, but it was near the Japanese sphere of influence in Manchuria.<sup>25</sup> This railroad dominated the economic life of Northern Manchuria and was a vital link that connected the Central Siberia and Maritime Territories that had considerable Russian populations. After 1917 the CER was under the joint administration of both the Chinese and Russian anti-Bolsheviks. In 1924 the Soviet government re-established its control over the CER by signing a treaty with the Chinese government in Beijing. However, at that time the Beijing government was under the dominance of General Wu Peifu and had no actual power as a national regime, but Manchuria was controlled by warlord Zhang Zuolin in Mukden, who was opposing the participation of the Beijing government in the CER's management,<sup>26</sup> thus preventing the USSR from actual control over the CER.

Another major obstacle to diplomatic resolution of the CER issue was Sino-Soviet controversy over the status of Outer Mongolia. For a long time, the Russian Empire had political and economic interests in this region and secured significant influence on its territory by signing the Treaty of Kyakhta with Yuan Shikai's Beijing government in 1915. By this treaty, China and Russia recognized Outer Mongolia's autonomy, which in fact resulted in a joint protectorate over this territory.<sup>27</sup> During the period of the Civil War in Russia and the Allied intervention in Siberia, China ended the agreement and formally incorporated Outer Mongolia into its territory. Following the advance of the Red Army to the east, troops of the White Guards were retreating to the territory of Mongolia. These White forces, which received Japanese support,<sup>28</sup> made Mongolian land a base for their attack on Soviet Russia and the Soviet satellite state – the Far

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<sup>24</sup> Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> David Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (London, UK: The World Affairs Book club, 1950), 184.

<sup>26</sup> Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924-1925," 471.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce A. Elleman, "Secret Sino-Soviet Negotiations on Outer Mongolia, 1918-1925," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 4 (Winter, 1993-1994): 540.

<sup>28</sup> James Boyd, *Japanese-Mongolian Relations, 1973-1945: Faith, Race and Strategy* (Folkestone, Kent, UK: Global Oriental, 2011), 90.

Eastern Republic. The Chinese and Mongolian authorities were unable to stop these anti-Soviet activities of the White forces. Consequently, under the pretext of eliminating the threat to Soviet territory, the Red Army entered Outer Mongolia on July 6, 1921. After that, struggle between Russia and China for dominance in Outer Mongolia was inevitable. China considered Outer Mongolia as its own, and protested the Red Army's actions, claiming them a violation of the China's territorial sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> As a response to this protest and one of its new policies towards neighboring Asian territories, Soviet Russia helped to establish a new pro-Soviet government at Urga in July 1921. Control over Mongolia, a buffer zone between Russian Siberia and Northern China, enabled Soviet Russia to prevent future anti-Soviet operations that could be launched from Mongolia or Manchuria.<sup>30</sup>

However, this victory complicated attempts of the Soviet Union to negotiate trade agreements and secure recognition from the Chinese Government in Beijing. In all negotiations China was rejecting Russian offers, demanding prior withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the Outer Mongolia. Therefore, the Soviet government needed an ally whose support would have brought the USSR its diplomatic recognition by the official Chinese government in Beijing and would secure Soviet influence in Mongolia and Manchuria. This Chinese ally should have sympathies with the Communist movement or at least be an anti-imperialist. He should have significant military and political power to help promote the Chinese National Revolution and should be capable to confront Zhang Zuolin and Japan, so that Soviet Union would not be involved in the direct conflict with Japan and Western powers. Since the beginning of the 1920s the Soviet leadership started to look for a suitable candidate as an ally in North China.

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<sup>29</sup> Elleman, "Secret Sino-Soviet Negotiations on Outer Mongolia, 1918-1925," 543.

<sup>30</sup> Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia, 1911-1921*, 254.



*The Soviet Search for a Warlord Ally in North China*

In the beginning of the 1920s Soviet Russia didn't have any political preference to choose a specific Chinese warlord as an ally in its attempt to resolve the aforementioned international issues in China. Thus, Soviet agents contacted the major warlords ranging from Zhang Zuolin, the Manchurian warlord, and Wu Peifu, who controlled the Beijing government in 1920-1924, to the progressive general Feng Yuxiang, who had joined the alliance between the Soviet and Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary government in Guangzhou. Soviet relations with these Chinese warlord forces were in constant change, depending on the changing political situation and Soviet interests.<sup>31</sup>

The Soviet Union mainly made attempts to pursue its nationalistic interests in China by forming an alliance with Sun Yat-sen's government in South China, and used it to contact the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin at first. Before Soviet diplomats were able to have the Beijing government accept joint Sino-Soviet management of the CER in 1924, as mentioned above, they turned to Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the KMT and the head of the revolutionary government in Guangzhou, which was opposed to the warlord-dominated central government in Beijing.<sup>32</sup> In January 1923, Soviet Ambassador Adolf Joffe and Sun Yat-sen signed a joint declaration, in which the Soviet Union declared its readiness to help Sun's KMT to achieve national unification and independence, and Sun Yat-sen accepted Soviet special interests in the CER and the presence of Soviet troops in Outer Mongolia.<sup>33</sup>

The signing of the Sun-Joffe declaration provided some basis for the Soviet claims on the CER, but Moscow still found it necessary to reconfirm it with Zhang Zuolin, the de facto ruler of Manchuria. Although Manchuria did not declare independence from the Beijing government until 1922, Zhang Zuolin was controlling the territory of the CER. Therefore, despite its fear that Zhang Zuolin was under Japanese influence, Soviet Russia was making attempts to reach

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 178.

<sup>32</sup> Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924-1925," 465.

<sup>33</sup> Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China: 1925-1945* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 79.

separate agreements with him. The first attempt was made in 1921, when a representative of the Far Eastern Republic, Ignatius Yourin, initiated negotiations with Zhang. After Zhang declared autonomy from Beijing in 1924, the Comintern sent its representative Maring to Manchuria for a discussion about the settlement for the CER. In 1923, Soviet Ambassador Lev Karakhan himself paid a visit to Zhang and attempted to start negotiations about the CER. All of these attempts were fruitless and Soviet leadership had no option but to approach Zhang through his ally, Sun Yat-sen.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of Sun Yat-sen's mediation, in August 1923 Zhang's autonomous government declared that it recognized the Soviet Union. In September 1924, the two sides signed the Fengtian-Soviet treaty. The Soviet government negotiated a separate agreement with Zhang Zuolin who had gained full control of the Chinese shares of the CER. Therefore, the CER was jointly controlled by Moscow and Mukden on equal basis.<sup>35</sup> Joint management of the CER also provided the Soviet government with the possibility of developing good relations with both Beijing and Mukden, benefitting from their rivalry, and still extracting profits from the railway.

For a short period, relations between the Soviet Union and Zhang Zuolin became warm. Zhang got better conditions than Beijing (in particular, the return date of the CER was reduced from 80 years to 60 years) by signing the agreement about the CER with the Soviet government.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union was considering supplying arms to Zhang,<sup>37</sup> and even made a propaganda move depicting Zhang Zuolin as a possible leader of the Chinese national politics. This potential was never realized, but it was quite real in 1925.<sup>38</sup> It was a success of Soviet

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<sup>34</sup> Yiwei Cheng, "Coping with Parallel Authorities: The Early Diplomatic Negotiations of Soviet Russia and China on the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1917–1925," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 9, No. 2 (2015): 235.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 236, 474–75.

<sup>36</sup> Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924–1925," 472.

<sup>37</sup> Nikita Vul, "He, Who Has Sown the Wind: Karakhan, the Sino-Soviet Conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1925–26, and the Failure of Soviet Policy in Northeast China," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 6 (2014): 1682.

<sup>38</sup> Waldron Arthur and Nicholas J. Cull, "Modern Warfare in China in 1924–1925: Soviet Film Propaganda to Support Chinese Militarist Zhang Zuolin," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 3 (1995): 407.

diplomacy, but the success was a temporary one. Soon after the signing of the agreement between Moscow and Mukden conflicts started between the two sides.<sup>39</sup>

Conflict soon arose from the management of the CER, and from the sale of Soviet arms to Zhang's enemy, Feng Yuxiang.<sup>40</sup> The control over the CER also allowed the Soviet government to increase its influence in Manchuria, which had long been a zone of special Russian interest and had large Russian communities. But Zhang Zuolin's government was a lasting obstacle to the expansion of Russian interests. As a result, the USSR in 1925 supported the rebellion of Guo Songling, a subordinate general of Zhang Zuolin, by preventing the latter from using the railway for transportation of his troops. After this incident Zhang arrested the Soviet manager of the CER, A. N. Ivanov. The only factors that restrained the Soviet government from open attack on the Manchurian warlord was the position of Japan, which was backing Zhang Zuolin at that time. Soviet leaders also feared to lose its reputation inside China by using such "imperialistic" methods. This conflict put an end to a potential alliance between the Soviets and Zhang Zuolin and made him a powerful enemy of the Soviet Union instead.<sup>41</sup> Thus the Soviet Union needed other allies that could help in its confrontation with the Manchurian warlord.

To deal with Zhang Zuolin, one of the potential warlord allies for the Soviets was Wu Peifu, the most important military and political leader in North China at the beginning of 1920s. The Soviet Union even attempted to bring about an alliance between Wu Peifu, Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese Communist Party, which was formed in 1921, to prevent the emergence of a Zhang Zuolin-dominated China.<sup>42</sup> The Soviet leadership was at first more interested in Wu Peifu as an ally than in Sun Yat-sen or Zhang Zuolin. After Wu Peifu seized control of the Beijing government in 1920, an article appeared in Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* (The News) predicting that

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<sup>39</sup> Vul, "He, Who Has Sown the Wind: Karakhan," 1677.

<sup>40</sup> Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1977), 115.

<sup>41</sup> Vul, "He, Who Has Sown the Wind: Karakhan, the Sino-Soviet Conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway," 1687, 1690-91, 1693.

<sup>42</sup> Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China: 1925-1945*, 79.

Wu would be oriented toward Soviet Russia. While Soviet representative Maring was talking to Sun in 1921, other Soviet representatives were simultaneously negotiating with Wu Peifu. However, Wu Peifu was not interested in an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviet Union maintained connections with Wu Peifu and conducted negotiations with him until the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1923, when Wu Peifu suppressed a strike of railway workers that was instigated by the Chinese Communist Party. Even after this railway strike, the Soviet government was still able to sign a treaty for joint control over the ECR with the Beijing government under Wu's control in 1924.<sup>44</sup>

Wu Peifu and Zhang Zuolin entered a civil war in 1924, but Wu's ally, Feng Yuxiang, left his position on the frontline and marched on Beijing. After he seized the capital, Feng overthrew the existing regime under Wu's dominance and appealed for a peace conference. Wu Peifu was defeated and fled to South China.<sup>45</sup> The emergence of Feng as a powerful figure in the Chinese politics made the Soviet Union consider him as a new potential ally. The idea for a Soviet alliance with Feng Yuxiang was actually proposed by Sun Yat-sen, who had become a Soviet ally in South China by that time. While planning the Northern Expedition in 1923, Sun had considered using Feng Yuxiang against Wu Peifu, who had been the major warlord in North China before his failure in Feng's coup in Beijing in 1924. The Soviet ambassador in China, Lev Karakhan, sent a letter to the chief adviser to Sun in Guangzhou, Mikhail Borodin, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1923, and his letter mentioned that a representative of KMT had contacted Feng Yuxiang with a proposal to use arms from Russia for an attack on Wu Peifu. However, at that time the Soviet government had not made a decision to support Feng Yuxiang, but rather it was the initiative of Sun Yat-sen, who tried to establish a revolutionary base in the North-Western China with Soviet help. Chinese communists also promoted the idea of a Soviet alliance with Feng. After the Beijing coup on October 23, 1924, a major leader of the Chinese Communist

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<sup>43</sup> Wilbur Martin C. and Julie Lien-ying How, *Documents on Communism, Nationalism, and Soviet Advisers in China, 1918-1927: Papers Seized in the 1927 Peking Raid* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 139-140.

<sup>44</sup> Elleman, "The Soviet Union's Secret Diplomacy Concerning the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924-1925," 471.

<sup>45</sup> David Bonavia, *China's Warlords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 105.

Party, Li Dazhao, persistently persuaded Karakhan and Borodin to help Feng Yuxiang because Li wanted to secure Feng's assistance to fight Zhang Zuolin.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, the Soviets quickly sought close relations with Feng Yuxiang, who controlled a new national government after the coup in Beijing and formed his own National People's Army (Guominjun). On October 27, 1924, Li Dazhao and a representative of the Nationalist Party arranged Karakhan's meeting with Feng. On November 5, Hu Jingyi, the deputy commander of Feng's National People's Armies, directly requested the Soviets' help with military supplies and advisers. Although Feng in December resigned from the Beijing government, he continued negotiations with Karakhan over the issue.<sup>47</sup> In the same month, Karakhan suggested that the Soviet government should support Feng Yuxiang's army. He also hoped that the Soviet support of Feng would help him to form an alliance with the KMT and result in the establishment of a revolutionary base in the North. But his major plan was to secure Soviet interests in the Northern China by creating a counterbalance to Zhang Zuolin. He wrote: "We must in all force support groups directed against Zhang Zuolin and first of all [supporting] Feng Yuxiang."<sup>48</sup> In March 1925, the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held a special meeting to study and make a decision about the aid to the National People's Army of Feng Yuxiang. Members of the Politburo decided that "the use of ... [Soviet] weapons by [Feng, who is] sympathetic to the Kuomintang [KMT] Chinese army is valid, but the weapons must be paid for." It thus decided to grant the requests of Feng Yuxiang and his generals, provide them with weapons, and to send advisors to their armies.<sup>49</sup>

Both the Soviet Union and Feng Yuxiang needed the alliance because they were in difficult situations after the Beijing coup that changed the balance of powers in China. The power of pro-Japanese warlords from Fengtian and Anhui groups was growing at that time, and

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<sup>46</sup> Galina S. Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China (the Evolution of Chinese Militarism in the 20-30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)* (Vladivostok: Dalnauka, 2001), 89.

<sup>47</sup> Yu Guantian, "Beijing Zhengbian zhi Guo Feng fan Zhang Shici yu Sulian Guanxi" (Relations between Feng Yuxiang and the USSR during the Period from the Beijing Coup to the Struggle between Feng Yuxiang and Guo Sunlin against Zhang Zuolin), *Xibei Jiaotong Xuebao* 11, no. 1 (February 2010): 131.

<sup>48</sup> Vul, "He, Who Has Sown the Wind," 1682

<sup>49</sup> Yu, "Beijing Zhengbian zhi Guo Feng fan Zhang Shici yu Sulian Guanxi," 131.

they helped increase the influence of Japan, the main rival of the Soviet Union in China. After Zhang Zuolin, the head of Fengtian group, pushed Feng out of Beijing and controlled the central government, the Soviet government was afraid that it would lose its influence in Northern China. Feng Yuxiang, who had allied with Zhang Zuolin in the Beijing coup but had quickly become his enemy, had more than 100,000 soldiers. After Wu Peifu's departure from the Beijing government, Feng's army was the only force that could counter Zhang Zuolin's force in North China. Moreover, Feng's invitation of Sun Yat-sen to Beijing for discussion about national unity assured the Soviet leadership that he had revolutionary tendencies.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the Soviets' choice of Feng Yuxiang as a partner could also have been caused by the death of Sun Yat-sen in Beijing on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1925. In February of that year, Borodin had reported that after the death of Sun Yat-sen, his KMT could potentially split into different factions. Moscow was not sure that after the death of Sun the KMT would continue his pro-Soviet policy. Judging by the fact the Soviet government decided to help Feng Yuxiang just few days after Sun Yat-sen's death, it was evidently in a hurry to compensate its loss of an influential ally by finding a new partner in China.<sup>51</sup>

Feng Yuxiang had his own reasons to seek Soviet assistance. After the Beijing coup, he faced a shortage of armaments and other military supplies, and the areas under his control had no arsenals and were not developed enough to fulfill his financial needs. His anti-imperialist attitude excluded the possibility for him to acquire armaments from Japan or Western powers. Thus, the Soviet Union, which shared the border with the territory controlled by Feng, was the only possible source of aid.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the Soviet-Feng alliance from the beginning was based on the pragmatic interests of both sides, which eventually would lead to their breakup in 1927, when Feng found that his interests contradicted with those of Soviet Russia.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Chaoyang Li, "Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu Sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great Revolution)", *Shehui Kexue Jikan*, no. 2 (2006): 140.

<sup>52</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Li, "Da Geming Shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu Sulian Hezuo Wenti Yanjiu, (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great Revolution)" 139.

However, at the beginning of 1925, both sides were interested in cooperation and the army of Feng Yuxiang became one of the major political partners of the Soviet Union in China. The Soviet leaders tried to control Feng by sending military advisers to his army, as they had done in Guangzhou. However, the group of advisers in Feng's army never became as large as the one in Guangzhou, and it achieved much less. Its chiefs, though experienced commanders, never achieved the same level of influence that Borodin and Blukher had exerted over the KMT.<sup>54</sup> For a better understanding of the failure of these Soviet advisers in Feng Yuxiang's army, it is necessary to examine the personal background of Feng and the history of his army.

### *Feng Yuxiang's Rise as a Warlord and His Short-lived Alliance with USSR*

Feng Yuxiang was both a powerful warlord and a popular political figure in China in the middle of 1920s. He became famous for his concern for soldiers, common people, and national interests, and his methods of military training were based on moral values from Christianity and traditional Chinese culture. These methods also combined anti-imperialist patriotic education with the requirements for moral improvement of soldiers, and later with the indoctrination of the Three People's Principles of Sun Yat-sen. Feng Yuxiang's plans of social and economic reforms made him famous inside and outside China. Thus, after his Beijing coup of 1924, Feng became an important ally of the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party, and the KMT under a common slogan of fighting warlordism and imperialism, despite each group having its own different interests.<sup>55</sup>

Feng Yuxiang was born in a poor peasant family of Zhili province in 1882. His father joined the army for the survival of his family. While Feng Yuxiang's parents occasionally starved,<sup>56</sup> they still managed to send Feng's older brother to school. After his older brother joined the cavalry, Feng Yuxiang attended school for three months, and later spent one more

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<sup>54</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 32.

year in school. This was the entirety of his formal education. At the age of ten, Feng Yuxiang enlisted in the army and served with his father for several years until he became a full-fledged soldier.<sup>57</sup> In 1902 Feng Yuxiang joined Yuan Shikai's New Army, where he began to advance steadily in the ranks. In 1905 he was transferred to Manchuria and became a company commander by the end of the year. In Manchuria his main duty was the suppression of bandit gangs, which added to his military experience. Additionally, he studied independently to compensate his lack of formal education.<sup>58</sup>

When the Republican Revolution broke out in Wuchang in October 1911, Feng Yuxiang took part in the revolutionary movement because he shared anti-Manchu views with revolutionaries. Thanks to the intervention of his uncle, Lu Jianzhang – one of Yuan Shikai's most trusted followers – Feng barely escaped execution during the suppression of revolutionaries inside the Qing army. Because of Lu's efforts Feng was just forced to resign his position in the army and return home.<sup>59</sup> However, in 1912 Yuan Shikai became the president of the Republic of China, and Feng returned to army service, becoming a regiment commander in 1913. In 1916 Yuan Shikai restored monarchy and proclaimed himself an emperor. Feng Yuxiang refused to support him and according to some historians, this refusal dealt a serious blow to Yuan Shikai's plans. When Feng's troops were sent to Sichuan to suppress anti-Yuan National Protection Army, he instead made a secret agreement with the rebels.<sup>60</sup>

In 1917 Feng Yuxiang again opposed Beijing's central government that was controlled by the warlords. He called for the end of its military confrontation with other warlord groups and refused to obey Beijing's government's orders in the civil war. For this he was deprived of his rank but retained an influence on his troops.<sup>61</sup> In the middle of 1917 the monarchist general, Zhang Xun, tried to restore the last Emperor Puyi to the throne. Feng and his troops played an important role in expelling Zhang Xun's soldiers from Beijing. As a reward Feng regained his

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>58</sup> Bonavia, *China's Warlords*, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>60</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 81.

<sup>61</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 63.



command.<sup>62</sup> In 1918 Feng Yuxiang was made the defense commissioner (*zhenshoushi*) of Changde, a city in Hunan province. Here Feng got a chance to put his ideas – based on Christianity – of military and moral training for his troops into practice.

Feng Yuxiang had felt curious about Christianity since 1906 when a missionary doctor cured his disease but refused to accept any payment. Feng joined a Bible study, and eventually found Christianity to be an effective way of fighting alcohol and drug abuse and maintaining peoples' morality. In 1911 Feng decided to become a Christian and was baptized at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Beijing.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter, he got fame as a "Christian general," and tried to spread the faith to his army. In 1918 when Feng was stationed in Changde, the number of baptized Christians in his army numbered 5,000 of his 9,000 troops.<sup>64</sup> For Feng, spreading the faith was a way of strengthening the morality and solidarity of his troops. Feng tried converting his officers to Christianity, thereby reinforcing their loyalty to him.<sup>65</sup>

Diana Lary, in her work *Warlord Soldiers. Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911-1937*, describes soldiers of Feng Yuxiang's National People's Armies as well-trained and well-disciplined men. Feng Yuxiang was famous for the quality of his troops and for the humane way he treated them. He attempted to produce a better class of a soldier by taking care of his soldiers and their families. In 1920 when drought struck Hebei, Feng Yuxiang gave special leave and sum of money to any Hebei native who wanted to go home to help their families. In 1923 a family, whose son was killed in battle received 230 yuan and a letter of condolence from the command of the National Peoples' Army. In the other armies' families were lucky to be notified about soldier's death, let alone to receive compensation. At the time, most other warlords made no such attempts to improve soldier's life, because such efforts were too costly and the rewards

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>63</sup> Paul P. Mariani, "China's 'Christian General' Feng Yuxiang: The Evangelist Jonathan Goforth and the Changde Revival of 1919," *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no.3, (2014): 246.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>65</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 83.

in the warlord system were too slim.<sup>66</sup> However, Feng Yuxiang recognized the need to improve the quality of his army for the future consolidation of the country.

Discipline in the First National People's Army under the command of Feng Yuxiang was very strict, especially in comparison with the Second and the Third National People's Armies under the control of his warlord allies, and the armies of other warlord groups. As Soviet reports testify, there was absolute obedience to superior officers and as a result, desertion, pillaging, and brutality against the local population were very rare. In order to achieve this level of discipline, Feng Yuxiang set strict requirements for recruitment. Enlisted soldiers were relatively homogeneous because they voluntarily joined the army and were recruited among village youth after certain selection. Feng's army did not admit bandits though it was common practice in other armies. Commanders paid attention to soldiers' needs and enjoyed popularity among them. In addition, other methods to discipline soldiers were widely applied as in other warlord armies: beating with bamboos, imprisonment and shooting. There was no gradation of punishment: it was either severe beating with bamboos or shooting.<sup>67</sup>

Feng Yuxiang paid special attention to the training and education of his army. He required all his soldiers to take part in heavy physical training which included boxing, gymnastics, swimming, exhausting route marches etc. Field training often took place in difficult weather conditions. Requirements were equally strict for both soldiers and officers. Officers had to pass physical training examinations and were rewarded or punished according to their results.<sup>68</sup>

Feng's care for his soldiers compensated the harsh training and discipline. As one of the Soviet advisers noted in his report, Feng was a soldier himself, born in a poor family, and that is why he knew the psychology of a soldier and his hardship. He always ate cold food with his soldiers and trained with them in the field. His speeches, which understood and appealed to the

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<sup>66</sup> Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers 1911-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9, 47, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Julie Lien-ying How, "Soviet Advisers with the Kuominchun, 1925-1926: A Documentary Study," *Chinese Studies in History* 19, no. 1-2 (1985-86): 105-107.

<sup>68</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 81.

soldier's state of mind, made his troops believe in him.<sup>69</sup> Feng Yuxiang was rather close to his soldiers and officers, and knew the names of 1400 of his 1600 soldiers. He visited sick soldiers, helped them, always ensured that they were well fed. He would also cancel punishment for those who were working hard, or who were sick or hungry. Feng even gave money for his soldiers to send home or to pay for their weddings and funerals.<sup>70</sup>

Feng Yuxiang also cared about the education of his soldiers and officers. Most of the recruits were illiterate but were taught how to read in his army. Junior officers were, according to the memoirs of the head of Soviet advisers in Feng Yuxiang's army, Vitaly Primakov, "semi-literate peasant boys."<sup>71</sup> Feng organized workshops to teach different trades to soldiers and officers, so they could support themselves in case they got dismissed from the army or got wounded. Such training also dissuaded them from becoming bandits since many disbanded soldiers had no other way to make a living at that time.<sup>72</sup>

In Changde of Hunan province, Feng Yuxiang started his program of moral improvement – not only for his army, but also for local people. He investigated opium smoking, gambling and prostitution in the local area. He then arrested opium dealers and confiscated their opium stocks. He ordered the closure of all brothels, despite this made him lose a source of revenue, the tax from prostitution. But the morality of his army was more important in his mind.<sup>73</sup>

According to Soviet accounts "Feng's beliefs were... patriotic in the narrow meaning of this word and it was very clear from his speeches. Also, in his every speech there were religious themes."<sup>74</sup> However, despite some skepticism that exists in the Soviet report, Feng's actions proved his patriotic views. His support for the May Fourth movement is an illustrative case. Although many warlords used patriotic rhetoric, Feng Yuxiang was sincerer and he openly

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<sup>69</sup> "Kharakteristika Feng Yuxiana (Characteristics of Feng Yuxiang)" in "Kollektsiya dokumentov po istorii revolyutsii v Kitaye (1922-1926) (Collection of documents on the history of the revolution in China (1922-1926))", Collection 627 "Collection of documents on activities of Soviet diplomats, military and political advisors in China", Vol. 17, p. 180, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), Moscow, Russia.

<sup>70</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 84-85.

<sup>71</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera* (Volunteer's Diaries)(Moscow: Nauka, 1967), 58-59.

<sup>72</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 78-79.

<sup>73</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> "Kharakteristika Feng Yuxiana (Characteristic of Feng Yuxiang)" in "Kollektsiya dokumentov po istorii revolyutsii v Kitaye (1922-1926)", Vol. 17, p. 180.

supported patriotic students in their protests against Japanese imperialism during this movement. In Changde of Hunan province where his troops were stationed, students boycotted Japanese goods and even attacked Japanese shops. The commander of a Japanese warship threatened to send marines to protect Japanese citizens, Feng ordered his soldiers to guard Japanese-owned shops to protect them, prohibiting anyone to enter or leave shops. Thus, he actually shut down Japanese businesses without giving Japan a reason to intervene and suppress protests. Feng's consistent support of the student protests in Changde reflected his anti-imperialist ardor and patriotism. Moreover, he openly telegraphed his opposition to civil war in February 1918 and subsequently lost his post for a while.<sup>75</sup>

In 1920, the civil war between the Anhui and Zhili groups of warlords broke out. At the beginning of this war the Anhui group controlled the government but were defeated by the Zhili Group. This group, led by Cao Kun and Feng's supervisor, Wu Peifu, seized and controlled the Beijing government. Feng supported Zhili Group in this war and as a reward was appointed military governor of the Henan province. After this, Feng's career changed dramatically. In 1921 Feng's troops transferred to Shaanxi province, and Feng became the military governor of the province. In 1922, Feng left Shaanxi and moved to Kaifeng to participate in the first major war of the Zhili group of warlords against the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin. The war resulted in the defeat of Zhang, whose military force was pushed beyond the Great Wall. In 1922 Feng Yuxiang transferred to Beijing to take the post of the Inspector General of the Army (*lujun jianyue shi*), an honorary title. As a result, he lost real power and revenue. Although the leader of Zhili warlord group, notorious President Cao Kun, ordered Feng Yuxiang be paid some subsidy, subsidy payments proved to be unreliable, and this maltreatment embittered Feng Yuxiang.<sup>76</sup>

In the two years after his defeat in 1922, the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin modernized his army in order to take revenge on the Zhili Group of warlords. In 1924 the second

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<sup>75</sup> Zhongping Chen, "The May Fourth Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination," *Modern China* 37, no. 2, (March 2011): 151.

<sup>76</sup> Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 189.

Zhili-Fengtian war started. On October 20 of that year, Feng Yuxiang formed a secret alliance with Zhang and suddenly turned his forces against the Zhili group, capturing the capital of Beijing. Feng forced President Cao Kun to resign, and invited Sun Yat-sen to Beijing for a meeting of national unity. Feng Yuxiang considered his action as the continuation of the Republican Revolution of 1911.<sup>77</sup>

After the defeat of the Zhili group, Feng Yuxiang obtained control of Beijing and several provinces including Zhili and Henan. By the end of 1924 his National People's Army expanded from 40,000 to 300,000 soldiers,<sup>78</sup> but his army's desperate need of armaments partly explains why Feng Yuxiang requested Soviet aid at the beginning of 1925. The Soviet leaders considered Feng Yuxiang one of the strongest warlords in the North of China and a promising ally. In March 1925 they decided to supply the National People's Army with armaments and military advisers.<sup>79</sup>

In April 1925 the first group of eighteen Russian advisers headed by Putna arrived in Kalgan, where Feng Yuxiang's headquarters was situated. Some of the advisers were senior and staff officers of the Red Army, which also had experts in communications, engineering, ordnance and logistics. In addition to the twenty-nine military advisers were two political workers, one doctor, and four interpreters. All their expenses were paid by the Soviet government.<sup>80</sup> The Kalgan group had the following working plan: to begin the training of officers in special schools, and to help create workshops for the manufacture of weapons and ammunition. Following this plan these advisers organized several schools: artillery, machine gun, infantry, cavalry, communications and engineering, and a commanders' school in Beijing.<sup>81</sup> Soviet advisers elaborated training programs, prepared manuals, and supervised learning processes. Soviet specialists also helped the Chinese military engineers convert civil workshops

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<sup>77</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 90.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> How, "Soviet Advisers with the Kuominchun, 1925-1926: A Documentary Study," 13.

<sup>80</sup> How, "Soviet advisers with the Kuominchun," 15.

<sup>81</sup> Sergei Alexandrov, "The Soviet Union's Assistance to National Armies in Northern China in 1925-1927," *Far Eastern Affairs* 36, no.3. (2008): 136.

into arsenals and start the production of ammunition. At the same time, Chinese engineers studied Soviet plans, using the information to build armored trains. It was a real break-through: prior to this nobody in Feng's National People's Army had heard about such an invention, because only the northern warlords – who had experience with Russian White Guards – had several armored trains under their command.<sup>82</sup>

Feng Yuxiang appreciated the advisers' help in building three armored trains and in training his artillery and cavalry officers. Soviet arms and munitions that arrived across Mongolia were vital for his National People's Army. However, these advisers still failed to establish close relations with Feng and his senior officers.<sup>83</sup> While the services of the Soviet communication, artillery, infantry, cavalry and engineering experts were welcomed in the National People's Army, its command made it clear that the works of its political workers were not needed. Feng Yuxiang suspected that political indoctrination would corrupt his troops. As a result, experienced military advisers were often used as “instructors who are explaining the meaning of military regulations.”<sup>84</sup>

Nonetheless, in November 1925 Feng supported Manchurian general Guo Songling in his rebellion against Zhang Zuolin. The rebellion was suppressed by Zhang with the help of Japan, but Feng's involvement led to his direct confrontation with the Manchuria warlord. Moreover, after Feng Yuxiang started to receive Soviet help, main northern warlords who were backed by the Western powers united against him. His army was in danger of being encircled by the warlords' forces, and had to withdraw from Beijing to Nankou Pass, northwest of Beijing. Hoping to resolve this crisis.<sup>85</sup> During the Anti-Fengtian war of 1925-1926 against Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin, National Peoples' Army suffered severe losses. Some units of troops, (Second and Third National Peoples' Armies), were not under the direct command of Feng

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<sup>82</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera* (Volunteer's Diaries), 14-15, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of Revolution*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Ivan Tonkikh, “Otnoshenie k Operativnim Sovetnikam po Opity Yuzhnoy Gruppi Pervoi Armii v Marte 1926 (Report About the Work in the Southern group of the First Army in March 1926)” in “Kollektsiya dokumentov po istorii revolyutsii v Kitaye (1922-1926)”, Vol. 17, 131.

<sup>85</sup> Edward L. Dreyer, *China at War, 1901-1949* (New York: Longman, 1995), 130-131.

Yuxiang and proved worthless. Moreover, Zhang Zuolin allied with Wu Peifu, and Feng faced the prospect of fighting them both simultaneously. Thus, Feng decided to resign from his post of the National Peoples' Army commander to avoid further hostilities. He gave two main reasons for this decision: his lack of education and his desire to avoid civil war.<sup>86</sup> In January 1926 Feng Yuxiang informed adviser Primakov that he could not continue the struggle in such difficult conditions and decided to go to the USSR to study. On May 9, 1926, Feng Yuxiang, accompanied by Primakov, arrived in Moscow. This trip to the USSR impressed Feng, and during his stay in Moscow he planned a series of socio-political reforms in China.<sup>87</sup>

In the USSR Feng Yuxiang met Leo Trotsky along with other prominent Soviet politicians, and together they signed agreements for a large amount of arms purchases. In August 1926, Feng Yuxiang was forced to return to China as the overwhelming forces of Wu Peifu put the National People's Army in a critical situation. After his return he proclaimed his support of the KMT and joined the Northern Expedition of the party's National Revolutionary Army in a joint effort to unify China. Meanwhile, the Soviet advisers joined his army.<sup>88</sup> Feng Yuxiang returned to China at the end of September. At that time the KMT had already started the Northern Expedition and victoriously entered the provinces of Central China. Feng Yuxiang soon joined the Northern Expedition. Coordinating their actions with the National Revolutionary Army, National Peoples' Army provided considerable support to the KMT.

By the middle of 1927 inner conflict divided the KMT into two fractions: a leftist faction led by Wang Jingwei which still had connections with communists; and a conservative faction led by Chang Kai-shek, who was an anti-communist general. After the Shanghai massacre of 12 April 1927, when Chang Kai-shek violently suppressed communist organisations, Feng Yuxiang declared that he did not consider Chang Kai-shek's actions counter-revolutionary, and that he wanted to continue the Northern Expedition together with Wang Jingwei and Chang Kai-shek.

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<sup>86</sup> How, "Soviet advisers with the Kuominchun," 59.

<sup>87</sup> Karetina, *Political-Military Groups of Northern China*, 99.

<sup>88</sup> Bonavia, *China's Warlords*, 110.

However, even though Feng supported both factions, he acknowledged Chang Kai-shek as his commander. In June Feng Yuxiang had a meeting with Chang Kai-shek in Xuzhou and they agreed to fight communists.<sup>89</sup> They jointly signed and sent a telegram declaring joint actions for the continuation of the Northern Expedition. Feng also "separately sent a telegram in Wuhan to Borodin", breaking relations with the Soviet Union. On July 27, when Borodin was returning to the USSR via Zhengzhou, Feng Yuxiang and his senior officers arrived at the station for a "solemn farewell ceremony" and sent guards to accompany Borodin on his way to Urga.<sup>90</sup>

Feng Yuxiang's alliance with USSR was not only short-lived but also ended abruptly. Although the breakup of the alliance has generally been ascribed to the negative impacts of Chiang Kai-shek's anti-communist actions,<sup>91</sup> there were more complicated causes for the end of the short-lived alliance. In particular, difference in political views between Feng and the USSR leaders, the ideological conflicts of Feng and his senior officers with Soviet Advisers, as well as internal problems experienced by the group of advisers from the beginning, had determined their eventually split with each other.

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<sup>89</sup> Suisheng Zhao, *Power by Design: Constitution-Making in Nationalist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 97-98.

<sup>90</sup> Li, "Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great revolution)," 143.

<sup>91</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 277; Li, "Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great revolution)," 143.



## Chapter Two

### Political and Ideological Issues in the Mission to Feng Yuxiang's Army

The USSR followed Leninist strategy of allying with Sun Yat-sen's regime in Canton, the so-called bourgeois revolutionary power, mainly for ideological reason, but it formed alliance with Feng Yuxiang because of concerns about Soviet strategic interest in northern China. Even though there was mutual mistrust between Soviet leaders and Sun Yat-sen, there was an ideological basis for their cooperation. Soviet decision to ally with Feng was pragmatic, although it was also ideologically motivated. Around 1925, Feng was more desirable ally than Sun Yat-sen, because of his military strength. He did not share revolutionary views of the USSR leaders as Sun did but used this opportunity to increase his military power. When Feng and the USSR did not trust each other but just used the alliance temporarily to achieve their respective goals, Soviet advisers' position was very unstable and their work very problematic. Throughout the whole mission Soviet advisers had political and ideological controversies with Feng Yuxiang, which eventually led to his split with the USSR and to the mission's failure.

#### *The USSR's Alliance with Feng Yuxiang and Their Political Conflicts*

In the beginning of the 1920s, Soviet foreign policy focused mainly on the Western countries, and Soviet leaders were "only peripherally interested in China." In its search for international recognition or global expansion of the revolution, the USSR was most interested in the Western countries. The USSR considered the success of the revolution in one of the European countries or establishment of diplomatic relations with them to be more significant than diplomatic or revolutionary success in China. However, eventually Soviet leadership started shifting its attention to the countries of Asia, in particular Sun Yat-sen's KMT and Feng

Yuxiang's military force in China. This turn to the East was Soviet Union's alternative strategy after it was unable to achieve its desired results in the West.<sup>92</sup>

Even before the turn to the developing countries in Asia, and even though Asian countries were the second priority for Soviet diplomats, Soviet leaders were aware of the revolutionary potentials and prospects in China. Chinese people were suppressed by landlords and warlords at home as well as foreign imperialist powers. Remembering their glorious past, Chinese were embittered by the low position of their country among the world's nations and were struggling for national salvation.<sup>93</sup>

Keeping China's revolutionary potential in mind, the Soviet government started addressing the people of China shortly after it came to power in November 1917, when Sun had just established his first government in Canton and Feng was still a minor warlord. In 1919 and 1920 the Soviet Union declared all imperialists to be common enemies of Russians and Chinese, expressed support for national independence of China and promised to renounce former concessions taken by the Russian Empire from the Qing government. After 1920, Soviet Russia started sending its emissaries to check conditions in China. The Communist International (or Comintern) officials such as Grigori Voitinsky, Henk Sneevliet (Maring) and Sergei Dalin were sent to China between 1920 and 1922 to gather information, establish contact with revolutionary groups and turn them toward Soviet Russia. But these efforts were still very limited. In 1922 prominent Soviet diplomat Adolph Joffe, who had worked in the Western countries, arrived in China.<sup>94</sup>

At that time both the CNP led by Sun Yat-sen and CCP sponsored by the Soviet Union were looking for an ally that would help them achieve their common goals for national unity and independence. Their other goals were different because Sun Yat-sen wanted to unite and rule China, but Soviet leaders wanted to promote world proletarian revolution and anti-imperialist

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<sup>92</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

struggle through their Chinese comrades. They also wanted to ensure the safety and consolidation of the new Soviet state through alliance with China. Thus, each side seemed to be driven to the alliance with different concerns.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, the Soviet at first pursued alliance with Sun's KMT rather than Feng's military forces. Lenin used Marx's ideas of alliance of the proletariat with bourgeois-nationalists to advance the social revolution to justify his policy in Asia and to overcome the controversy over allying with non-proletarian forces like Sun Yat-sen's KMT.<sup>96</sup> In particular, in 1916, speaking of China, Persia and Turkey, Lenin stated that socialists "need to support, as decisively as they can, the most revolutionary elements of bourgeois-democratic national-liberation movements in these countries and to help them... in their revolutionary war against the imperial powers oppressing them."<sup>97</sup> At the Second Comintern Congress that was held in Petrograd and Moscow in 1920, Lenin declared that it was the duty of Comintern to enter in temporary agreements and even alliances with bourgeois democrats, though not to merge with them. Thus, theoretical foundations of the Soviet policy towards China were established on this congress. The cooperation between KMT and the CCP was pursued because of the Soviet alliance with Sun Yat-sen.<sup>98</sup>

However, the Soviet would also turn to alliance with Feng because of mistrust of Sun's KMT. Lenin believed that communists, while taking part in bourgeois movements, should promote democratization from within and, if conditions permitted, to establish communist organizations for struggle against capitalism in these countries. Lenin highlighted the tactical and temporary nature of this course, stressing that the bourgeois class should be supported only if they did not prevent the communist agitation among working people, fight against exploitation

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<sup>95</sup> Lydia Holubnychy, *Michael Borodin and the Chinese revolution, 1923-1925* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: East Asian Institute, Columbia University, 1979), 126.

<sup>96</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Penguin Classics, 2011), 258.

<sup>97</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Complete Set of Works)*, XXVII (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1962), 261.

<sup>98</sup> Holubnychy, *Michael Borodin and the Chinese revolution*, 129.

and feudalism. Otherwise, communists should fight against bourgeois movements. Thus, the revolution in Asia, especially China, was regarded as a part of the world socialist revolution.<sup>99</sup>

According to the strategy of allying with *bourgeois* nationalist movements, Sun was a natural ally for the Soviet Union. However, the political course that Sun chose left little hope that he would build a party that was oriented towards the working-class.<sup>100</sup> Sun and his bourgeois supporters were afraid that Communism became an established political system in China. When Sun signed the agreement, known as Sun–Joffe Manifesto, with Soviet diplomat Adolph Joffe, he stated that he and the Soviet government had common goals, but noted that “at present it was impossible to establish communist system.”<sup>101</sup> In doing so, he tried to protect his party from communist influence. In return, many influential people in the Comintern and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) disapproved plans to support Sun, believing him to be an “unpromising political figure.” Grigori Voitinsky, Comintern representative in China, wrote to one of the Comintern leaders Karl Radek, indicating that “Chinese Nationalist Party is not a nationalist party at all, it is just one of the militarist groups.”<sup>102</sup>

Even though Sun’s vision for China’s future was very different from that of his Soviet allies, his political program contained some ideas, including the anti-imperialist struggle for national independence, that could become a basis for KMT’s alliance with Soviet communists. From ideological point of view, this justified Soviet cooperation with Sun as it fitted the communist agenda. Nevertheless, Sun was not the only potential Soviet ally in China. The USSR considered other political and military leaders who used patriotic and democratic rhetoric as possible partners. One of them was Feng Yuxiang, one of the northern military and political

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<sup>100</sup> Alexander Yurkevich, *Moscow – Canton, the 1920’s: The USSR Assistance to the Guomindang and Two Strategies of the Unification of China* (Moscow: Variant, 2013), 41–42.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>102</sup> Voitinsky, Letter to Radek, March 1923, in Collection 495 “Postoyannaya Komitet Politsecretariata IKKI (The Standing Committee of the Political Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International)”, Vol. 17, 209, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), Moscow, Russia.

leaders who was a major recipient of Soviet aid in 1925-1927, and who also happened to be a typical warlord.<sup>103</sup>

In the early 1920s, Feng Yuxiang possessed significant military and political power in northern China, making him a desirable ally of the USSR not for ideological reasons but for practical concerns. At certain moments of Soviet cooperation with Feng, he was considered to be an even more important ally than (and a possible alternative to) Sun Yat-sen. In 1925 the CPSU approved a policy of supporting revolutionary movement in the north of China, so called northern way of Chinese revolution. This policy included massive support for the National Peoples' Armies of Feng Yuxiang. The KMT's forces were supposed to stay in Guangdong and play an auxiliary role in the unification of the country.<sup>104</sup> It was obviously against the KMT's plans to rule China. Soviet advisors in Guangzhou who were familiar with the situation in the army of Feng Yuxiang noted that the National Peoples' Armies had better armaments, especially artillery, which means that Feng Yuxiang received more significant help from the USSR than Sun Yat-sen did. KMT leaders asked Soviet government to clarify its policy towards their party but did not receive any definite answer. The KMT's attempts to join Comintern also failed. Apparently, for a moment, Moscow valued Sun Yat-sen's party less than it did Feng's National Peoples' Armies.<sup>105</sup>

The internal crisis in KMT caused by Sun Yat-sen's poor health and death was another reason for Soviet leaders to consider Feng Yuxiang as a more suitable partner. In February 1925 Borodin reported that after Sun Yat-sen's death, three distinct factions (left, right and moderate) would form in the KMT. "There is a possibility that KMT would split", the adviser said. Soviet government was afraid that after Sun Yat-sen passed away, KMT would end its cooperation with the USSR. Considering that the decision to provide support for Feng Yuxiang was made on the

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<sup>103</sup> Usov, *Sovietskaya Razvedka v Kitaye: 20-e godyi XX veka* (*Soviet Intelligence in China in the 1920s*), 146.

<sup>104</sup> Natalia Mamaeva, *Komintern i Gomin 'dan. 1919-1927* (*The Comintern and the Kuomintang: 1919-1929*) (Moscow: Rosspen, 1999), 125 –152.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 182 – 186.

day after Sun Yat-sen's death, it is possible that the Soviet leaders hurried to fill the gap in the Chinese revolutionary movement and find a new ally to replace Sun.<sup>106</sup>

Feng Yuxiang's biographer James Sheridan assumed that after Sun Yat-sen's death it was possible for Feng to replace him as the head of Li. According to Sheridan, two and a half months after Sun Yat-sen passed away, one of the KMT leaders, Li Liejun, traveled to Kalgan and offered Feng the opportunity to become Sun's successor. Though Feng never became the head of KMT, he had no intention to subordinate himself to KMT leadership. On the contrary, because the KMT demonstrated little military potential in 1925, Feng Yuxiang felt that the party should be his junior partner, rather than vice versa.<sup>107</sup>

Feng Yuxiang had strong military power and had reason to believe that his victory over Zhang Zuolin, another major warlord in northern China, would make him the dominant power in China, even if it was to be achieved with Soviet and KMT assistance. In such situation, it was not surprising that the USSR wanted him as an ally. Feng also had nationalist and anti-imperialist views but did not share ideologies of his communist and KMT partners. Thus, the alliance of Feng Yuxiang and the USSR was caused by immediate political needs, rather than similarity of political views. Feng Yuxiang used Sun's ideas to help his bargain with the USSR, because he had no other sources of military supplies. On the other hand, Soviet communists used Feng to promote their nationalist interest, because he was the most convenient political figure for this purpose. It is important to keep in mind that Soviet policy of allying non-communist forces implied that these alliances were temporary. Feng was also waiting until he achieved more power to terminate this burdensome relation and become independent. So, it is not surprising that there were a lot of contradiction between the two allies and their interests.<sup>108</sup>

In the early years of the Chinese Republic, Feng Yuxiang's support of the new republic gave him a reputation of a revolutionary. However, when he started dealing with genuine

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<sup>106</sup>Li, "Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great revolution)," 140.

<sup>107</sup>, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 171-172.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

revolutionaries, he stood out like a real warlord. As a Chinese, Feng Yuxiang was anti-imperialist and perhaps moderately anti-foreign. But as a warlord he could not express such views freely because, as many other warlords did, he depended on foreign help. For example, after the May 30<sup>th</sup> Incident, when Shanghai Police officers opened fire on Chinese protesters in Shanghai's International Settlement, Feng Yuxiang issued some anti-imperialist statements. However, even though the events that culminated in the May 30<sup>th</sup> Incident started in Japanese-owned mills, Feng did not include Japan in his speeches. It was probably because in the summer 1925 Feng planned to permit Japan to develop territories that he controlled, send students to Japan and invite Japanese advisors.<sup>109</sup> The same way, though the USSR acted in Mongolia and Northern Manchuria in the same manner the Russian Empire did, Feng did not express his discontent by the Soviet actions openly, because he needed Soviet help. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate at all when he expressed his views in his domain – that is, in his army. Despite his cooperation with the USSR, for Feng Russians were just foreigners, and he treated them as such.

When Soviet advisers first arrived in Feng Yuxiang's headquarters, they saw a huge poster on the wall. The poster showed a map of China during the period of the Qing Empire, before foreign intervention and the signing of unequal treaties with Western powers. Cross-hatched areas on the map represented territories that were taken from China. The poster was called "The map of national shame." The sentence that "These lands are not ours any more" was written on the map. Soviet advisers were shocked when they saw that along with Mongolia, Indochina, Hong Kong, Taiwan and foreign concessions, the map marked parts of the Soviet territory, including Vladivostok, as being "taken from China."<sup>110</sup>

The head of the Soviet advisers' group Vitovt Putna indignantly noted that it was very strange for Feng to simultaneously request Soviet help and set unfounded claims on Soviet territory. Li Dazhao, one of the founders of the CCP who acted as a mediator between Feng and the USSR, managed to settle this issue. Li reminded advisers that Feng Yuxiang was a warlord

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>110</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera* (Volunteer's Diaries), 40.

until recently, and he eventually managed to convince Feng Yuxiang to remove the map. Gradually, political agitation in the National Peoples' Armies increasingly targeted imperialism rather than foreigners in general.<sup>111</sup>

Feng Yuxiang officially supported KMT ideas and even showed interest in communism, but never fully accepted Sun's Three Peoples principles or communist ideas. When he was in Beijing, just before he went to the USSR to look for more support and (in his words) to study, Feng had a conversation with Borodin and Primakov. When Borodin asked why he did not want to fulfill the desire of the Chinese people to overthrow the government of Duan Qirui and form a provisional government, Feng Yuxiang answered vaguely. He said that he wanted to become a simple worker, to study in the USSR and did not want to be concerned with politics. In his conversation with Primakov Feng was more straightforward: "I am a revolutionary only by half, otherwise I would have to arrest President Duan Qirui. I was a revolutionary in the first year of the republic ... I was always attacked because of this."<sup>112</sup>

It was hard for Soviet advisers to work with such an inconsistent ally. Vishniakova-Akimova, Soviet interpreter in the Kalgan group of the Soviet advisers, admitted that Feng Yuxiang had a remarkable personality and organizational capabilities. He was also a man of great willpower and had a progressive frame of mind. She mentioned that several of her comrades were truly charmed by Feng. For example, advisers used to say that Primakov "was in love" with Feng. However, some members of the group had different opinions on Feng Yuxiang. They thought that he was too self-assured and did not share his plans with anyone. He could not stand equals and, most importantly, was an inconsistent politician who often acted contrary to his earlier decisions. For example, in June 1925 he issued an anti-imperialist communique about the events of the May 30 events that happened in Shanghai in the *Workers' Weekly*, the news organ of the British Communist party. He sent telegrams to Beijing and local governments, calling for a decisive struggle against imperialism. But at the end of July, Feng issued a statement to his

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China. 1925-1927*, 126.



army in which he denied his closeness to the communists and stressed his disagreements with them.<sup>113</sup>

Primakov recalled that Feng Yuxiang was always speaking about his friendship with Sun Yat-sen and his respect for KMT but was consistently refusing to cooperate with its revolutionary government in Canton. All political propaganda, excluding his own anti-imperialist speeches, was forbidden in his army. It took Soviet advisers a long time to convince Feng Yuxiang to allow the opening of political clubs where they could lecture soldiers and officers about current political events in China and the ideas of Sun Yat-sen. Feng reluctantly agreed, but limited the number of the political clubs.<sup>114</sup> In January 1926 senior adviser Makedonsky noted in his report that on the eve of the Tianjin operation<sup>115</sup> legal political work in Feng Yuxiang's army was still forbidden. The only real exception was a two-week course that Feng opened to train anti-imperialist agitators before the operation.<sup>116</sup>

Some Russians in the Kalgan group were disturbed by Feng's staged demonstration of democracy, by which Feng used to win popularity. The advisers told Vishnyakova-Akimova of how often, when Feng's train was approaching its destination, the marshal would move from his comfortable car to the baggage car at the preceding station. When the crowd was waiting for him at the first-class car, he would modestly emerge from the baggage car, with a soldier backpack on his shoulders. As these Soviet advisers recalled, it always made a great impression on people.<sup>117</sup>

Feng Yuxiang was using progressive ideas to win popular support, but in his army, he did not want any forms of democracy or other new ideas. He did not want to accept Soviet advisers, because he was afraid that the spread of communist ideas could weaken his absolute control over the troops. After the start of the "May 30<sup>th</sup>" movement, Feng organized a special military school

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>114</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer's Diaries)*, 16.

<sup>115</sup> Tianjin operation was one the main battles during the war between Feng Yuxiang and Zhang Zuolin in 1925. It resulted in the capture of Tianjin, important trade port near Beijing, by the forces of Feng Yuxiang.

<sup>116</sup> Makedonsky, "O Nashey Voennoi Rabote (About Our Military Work [in Feng Yuxiang's Army])", January 12, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China*, 82

for almost one thousand students who had fled to Kalgan. Some Soviet advisers took the posts of instructors at this school. To get the support of students, Feng visited the school several times a week, making speeches or inspecting barracks. He examined students' living conditions and tasted their food. When the food was not well-cooked, Feng ordered the beating of cooks with sticks.<sup>118</sup>

Feng's seemingly democratic actions helped him win students' sympathies, because ordinary people were used to seeing generals from a distance, surrounded by guards, and not walking among them. Sometimes, Feng spent all day at the school, taking a break from his work with students. Such proximity to marshal Feng and important political figures made students feel that they were participating in their country's politics and that they were the "army's elite."<sup>119</sup> As more and more students started leaning to the left, Feng Yuxiang began to fear that the school would become a center for propaganda of socialist ideas and would undermine his troops' loyalty. After that, he expelled several extremely left-wing students, and soon after he closed the school.<sup>120</sup>

Soviet advisers faced many restrictions in their political work in the army and in the educational work at the school. On 27 November 1925, when a war between Feng Yuxiang and Zhang Zuolin broke out, all military schools opened by the Russians were closed. After that, Soviet advisers expected that they would have a chance to prove themselves in battle and win the respect of marshal Feng and his troops. Vishnyakova-Akimova recalled that "enthusiasm reigned among the advisers" after the beginning of the war. However, they soon found out that their military help was also not needed.<sup>121</sup>

With the beginning of the military actions, the advisers' work was interrupted. Only some of them were at the frontline, while others did not have any particular posts. Several of Feng's

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<sup>118</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer's Diaries)*, 113.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Li, "Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu Sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great Revolution)," 140.

<sup>121</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China*, 109.

generals tolerated Soviet instructors in peace time, but now tried to get rid of them.<sup>122</sup> Advisers were not warned about the upcoming operation against Zhang Zuolin and were not invited to take part in the planning of the operation. They only received information that was already known from newspapers. At the moment when the First National Peoples' Army was in danger, Feng's generals did not want to use advisers' services until situation became really serious. But these generals still tried to prevent advisers from doing any serious work, leaving to them only the technical functions of training instructors.<sup>123</sup>

When the Soviet general in charge of the Kaifeng advisers' group, Sinani, demanded permission for Soviet advisers to take part in actual military action, Feng's division commander Sui Yucheng, who previously insisted on sending him Soviet instructors, refused to do so. He said that he was not planning to take Soviet advisers to the frontline, arguing that he did not want to burden them with the difficulties of travel. Sui agreed to let them go to the frontline only because of Sinai's persistent pressure. However, it appeared to be an empty promise, as Sui left without Soviet advisers. Three advisers and two translators were provided with only one one-horse carriage without any guards. They had to catch the army, which was already two days ahead. Sinai called it the "usual Chinese sabotage". The divisional chief of staff told them that the division commander did not want to take them and later agreed only because general Sinani insisted. He also added: "You can go, but we are not very interested in this trip." In such situation advisers had nothing to do but refused to go. After that advisers were ordered by Sinani to immediately leave for Kaifeng if such an attitude would continue.<sup>124</sup>

Feng Yuxiang supported Soviet ideas only to the extent that it allowed him to receive military supplies, as he had no intention to promote Soviet interests that contradicted his own concerns. Advisers were considered by him as inevitable addition to guns and he saw no use in their help. Feng was very sensitive to the fact that Soviet advisers were introducing new ideas

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Anders, "Dolkad o Nyneshnei Sityatsii (Report About the Current Situation)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 219.

<sup>124</sup> "Dokald o Gruppe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report about the 2nd Army's Advisers Group)," December 13, 1925, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 2.

into its troops, and actively resisted any actions that, in his opinion, could decrease his personal control over the army. That is why Feng did not want advisers to fully participate in military actions and to do any significant political or educational work.<sup>125</sup> Feng was very cautious towards any political activities Soviet advisers conducted in his army. For example, on one of the meetings Feng banned slogan “Down with warlords!”<sup>126</sup> When advisers tried to discuss with Feng the organization of the KMT agitation in his army, he answered that “Military man is non-partisan,” thus showing that he was not interested in any political activity in National Peoples’ Army.<sup>127</sup>

The Soviet Union stated that it had the same common goals and interests with Feng Yuxiang and called him a Soviet ally. But in practice, the USSR did not always take care of its ally’s interests seriously; in fact, the level of Soviet help depended on the degree of realization of Soviet state interests. Despite the Soviet Union proclaimed cancelation of all unequal treaties signed between the Russian Empire and China, it did not give up its rights on the Chinese Eastern Railway in Northern Manchuria. It created tensions in Soviet relations with the Beijing government and all groups that wanted to seize power in China. When Soviet troops entered Outer Mongolia, it was considered as an act of imperialist aggression by all patriotic Chinese people.<sup>128</sup>

As we know, Feng Yuxiang was a patriot and had nationalist views. Thus, he could not accept his ally’s claims for control over Manchuria and Outer Mongolia. Feng Yuxiang wrote in his diary in November 1925: “Russians in Mongolia are violating agreements, which is wrong, it is necessary to find a way to make them leave.”<sup>129</sup> This shows Feng’s anti-imperialist and patriotic views. But in the transcript of the meeting of the Chinese Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU it is clearly stated that to obtain Soviet help, Feng should

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<sup>125</sup> Li, “Da geming shiqi Feng Yuxiang yu sulian hezuo wenti yanjiu (Research of the cooperation between Feng Yuxiang and the Soviet Union during the Great revolution),” 140.

<sup>126</sup> “O Fen Yuxiane (About Feng Yuxiang)” in Collection 627, file 17, 180.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>128</sup> Yurkevich, *Moscow – Canton*, 55

<sup>129</sup> Feng Yuxiang, *Fengyuxiang riji* (Feng Yuxiang’s Diary), Part II (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992), 17, 51.

have met several conditions. "First, the help is not free. It should be repaid in full with money, or partially with money, partially with raw materials, the method of payment and conditions are determined in accordance with the main political agreement. Transportation costs they [Feng Yuxiang and his National Peoples' Armies] also pay themselves ... Feng gives unilateral written guarantees of acceptance of the [Soviet] plan for Mongolia and not granting any concessions to foreigners in the zone of his influence." Feng also should recognize the independence of Mongolia, agree with the deployment of Soviet troops on the territory of Mongolia and grant the USSR concessions on the territory controlled by his armies.<sup>130</sup>

At the moment, there are no documents that could prove Feng Yuxiang's acceptance of those conditions. But the Soviet party documents contain statement by the Soviet leaders that "the shipment of armaments will continue only after comrade Karakhan will receive the answer about the concessions" from Feng. It also assumed that the fact that Feng's National Peoples' Armies continuously received Soviet armaments could mean that Feng accepted or promised to accept some conditions that were beneficial to the USSR. Initially the Soviet implied that Feng Yuxiang should pay for the supplies he received in full. Only after Feng became unable to pay for them that the help was proclaimed to be free. The USSR tried to present their help as the demonstration of the sublime spirit of proletarian internationalism, even though Feng was writing that there should be no doubt that all help to the Chinese revolutionaries should be unconditional.<sup>131</sup> But in reality, the Soviet Union tried to get as much as possible from Feng Yuxiang without considering his interests.

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<sup>130</sup> *Gongchan guoji, lian gong (bu) yu zhongguo geming dang'an ziliao congshu: di yi ce (VKP(b), Comintern and Chinese National Revolutionary Movement (1920-1925). Vol. 1)* (Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 1997), 192.

<sup>131</sup> Feng Yuxiang, *Feng Yuxiang zizhuan (Autobiography of Feng Yuxiang)* (Beijing, Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1988), 160.

*Ideological Contradictions between Soviet Advisers and Feng Yuxiang*

Political conflicts between Soviet advisers and Feng Yuxiang were aggravated by deep ideological differences between them. Because of his patriotism and anti-imperialism Feng was considered by the USSR as a progressive leader who could help the spread of communism in China. Although the two sides shared some interests (e.g. struggle against unequal treaties between China and foreign powers, anti-imperialism etc.) at given points in time, their ideological views were not identical. Feng's patriotism was expressed in his anti-imperialism, which sometimes turned against all foreigners, including Soviet advisers. Feng Yuxiang respected the ideology of Sun Yat-sen, but followed it only to the extent that allowed him to receive weapons from the USSR.<sup>132</sup> As a warlord Feng did not favor communism — he was afraid of the workers' movement.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, the atheistic revolutionary ideology of the USSR made Soviet officers disapprove of Feng's use of Christianity to increase discipline in the army. But Feng Yuxiang demonstrated ideological insensitiveness by using the services of both Soviet advisers and their worst enemies — the White Guards. All this led to ideological contradictions that made cooperation between Feng, his officers and Soviet advisers very problematic.

Feng Yuxiang and Soviet advisers differed not only in political ideas, but also over methods of war and attitudes towards the enemy. The National Peoples' Army was different from other warlord armies because of several factors in its development: its commanding officers included more representatives from lower-classes; the army was not revolutionary but was influenced by revolutionary and nationalist movements.<sup>134</sup> Primakov told the following story about Division Commander general Feng, who was the head of military schools opened by Soviet advisers. The general had very high self-esteem, but also was a very hard worker. Six years ago, Primakov met him, he was still Feng Yuxiang's cook, but very quickly received the

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<sup>132</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 171.

<sup>133</sup> Anders, "The First Guominjun and Feng" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 222; Sinani (Georgy Skalov), "Doklad o Grappe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report About the 2nd Army's Advisers Group)", December 13, 1925, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 40.

promotion. He did not have military education but was very interested in military science and used every opportunity to learn. Primakov had a high opinion of general Feng and wrote that “China would have a very good army, if it had more such cooks.”<sup>135</sup>

The presence of representatives from lower classes among the National Peoples’ Army’s commanders made it more prone to the influence of the growing Chinese nationalist and revolutionary movements on one hand and, to lesser extent, to the Soviet influence. The influence of the Soviet Union was strengthened by material needs and the geographic position of the National Peoples’ Army. Because of these influences, by February 1926, advisers noticed that Feng Yuxiang and his prominent generals were trying to find progressive slogans and ideological expression of their activities, with Feng Yuxiang playing an exceptional role. It seems that the National Peoples’ Army was undergoing ideological transition, but had not yet stopped being a warlord army, the tactics of which remained the extraction of revenue for Feng and his generals. It had not become truly a peoples’ army.<sup>136</sup>

However, one report, written by Maisky,<sup>137</sup> an interpreter of the Kalgan group of advisers, for the assistant military attaché Valentin Trifonov, reveals the insurmountable differences between the Soviet advisers’ attitudes to war and those of the National Peoples’ army commanders. “What is the [National] Peoples’ Army from the point of view of its generals, who are not revolutionaries at all? It is some kind of a ‘business enterprise’, that provides material benefits ..., power and position, that gives an opportunity to influence the county’s politics.” According to Maisky, “as any other enterprise, National Peoples’ Army was guided by the principle of gaining greatest benefit at minimum cost.” This principle played a very important role in the Army’s attitude to war.<sup>138</sup>

A war was assessed in terms of how beneficial it could be for the “enterprise”. Soviet advisers had the following attitude: “In time of war we should fight, if there is an enemy, it

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<sup>135</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer’s Diaries)*, 63.

<sup>136</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 41.

<sup>137</sup> Real name Veniamin Gamberg.

<sup>138</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 41.

should be destroyed!” It was totally different from the views of the National Peoples’ Army’s commanders. For them a war did not necessary entail a fight. Once at a banquet high-ranking staff officer Huan told adviser Primakov that “a war requires very big expenditures, in particular, high consumption of shells. That is why duban (governor-general) Feng, considering [army’s] economic difficulties, tries never start a war first and to avoid it if it is possible. And to resort to war only if it is unavoidable.” General He, who was very close to the duban Zhang Zhijiang, explained this philosophy to adviser Sergeev in the following way: “Duban thinks that all issues should be settled by peaceful means, war should be avoided by all means.” He also pointed that war was very hard for the people and the country. These examples shed light on the attitude of the National Peoples’ Army’s commanders regarding war and the enemy, and as a result, the different understandings of the methods of warfare held by Chinese generals and Soviet advisers.<sup>139</sup>

Officers, with some exception, did not enlist in the army to fight in a war. Experience, gained during his work as an interpreter at the courses for the Chinese higher command and from “friendly” conversations with officers, made Maisky conclude that, for most officers, army service was a way to earn a living, accumulate capital (which was mainly invested in land and business), and to achieve a higher position in society. With such attitude officers lacked any ideological incentives to serve, had a lot investment in their posts, and were hesitant to sacrifice their lives in any struggles. Maisky’s “best friend,”<sup>140</sup> Feng’s Guards Brigade major Wu told him that the commanders of the National Peoples’ Army very much appreciated Feng Yuxiang’s policy of “not getting into a fight, thus saving lives ... of the officers and trying to settle the matters of war by political methods.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, officers and generals of the National Peoples’ Army, including marshal Feng Yuxiang, were not motivated to destroy the enemy, which Soviet advisors could not understand and tried to fight against.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Quotes as in the original document by Maisky.

<sup>141</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 42.



Specific attitude that Feng Yuxiang and his officers had towards warfare led to a specific attitude towards the enemy. The goal of the National Peoples' Army's commanders was not necessarily to fight with the enemy and destroy it, as Soviet advisers thought. To the contrary, methods of open struggle were the least desirable. These Chinese generals and officers believed that it was necessary to win without actual fight, and therefore without financial losses and casualties among troops. In the best-case scenario, they hoped to save the opportunity to establish in the future a temporary alliance with former enemy against another rival.<sup>142</sup>

Maisky had friends among local Chinese who were another valuable source of useful information about the situation in the army. Maisky befriended a local lawyer, who was in friendly relations with many officers of the National Peoples' Army. The lawyer told Maisky that one of the reasons for Feng's brief retirement in early 1926<sup>143</sup> was his reluctance to continue the struggle started by Guo Songling, Zhang Zuolin's general, who rebelled against Zhang and made an alliance with Feng. If marshal Feng had stayed on his post, he would have had to continue fighting for moral reasons because he had an agreement with Guo Songling. This meant that Feng Yuxiang would have to take active part in "a really big fight", which was not acceptable for Feng and his generals, because of their approach to warfare.<sup>144</sup>

Not only methods of war, but the very nature of the war in China caused ideological conflicts between Soviet advisers and Feng Yuxiang and his officers. The problem was that while war in China was an internal conflict, it was *not* a civil war motivated by class struggle, as the Soviet Union wanted it to be. Instead, its rivaling armies, including Zhang Zuolin's, the National Peoples' Army and other warlord armies had officers who were often old schoolmates, sometimes even relatives. For example, Guo Songling and some of his officers had such relations with National Peoples' Army officers. Guo himself was a schoolmate of Feng Yuxiang's chief of staff Liu Ji, and Guo's wife was a missionary college friend of Feng

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Feng Yuxiang retired from all his posts in January 1926 and traveled to Moscow, where he conducted negotiations with the Soviet government. In September 1926 Feng returned to the post of the commander of the National Peoples' Army.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Yuxiang's wife.<sup>145</sup> Soviet advisors were very surprised when they found out that, opposite to what they had felt, officers of the National Peoples' Army were not eager to fight against the officers of another army.<sup>146</sup>

At an official banquet Primakov proposed to commemorate "fallen heroes of the National Peoples' Army" by standing up, but general Shi, the representative of the duban Zhang Zhijiang, objected, stating that officers and soldiers of *both* armies who were killed in war deserved to be commemorated. He added that there was no heroism in killing enemy soldiers, because both sides represented one nation, and their killing of each other was not a deed or something good for the country, but worth deep regret. Thus, when Soviet officers insisted that their Chinese allies increase combat activity, they were perceived not as advisers, who wanted to help, but as foreigners, inciting Chinese people fight each other.<sup>147</sup> Differences in attitudes about warfare and the enemy, as well as an insufficient understanding of the Chinese realities by advisers led to steady deterioration in relations between Soviet advisors and Feng Yuxiang and his officers.

Difference in attitudes to the enemy once again caused ideological confrontation between Feng and his Soviet advisors when it came to the relations with the White Guardsmen – members of Russian Anti-communist White movement who fought against communists during the Civil War in Russia (1917 –1922) and fled in large numbers to China after their defeat. Most of the military men in a Soviet mission to China had been through the Russian revolution and Civil War, and many of them had been decorated for their valor.<sup>148</sup> Only three years after the Civil War, their memories of the war and their hostility to former enemies were still very fresh. Senior cavalry adviser Pyotr Zuyk,<sup>149</sup> a distinguished war veteran, got into several fights with White Guards, during the group's stay in Beijing.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer's Diaries)*, 130.

<sup>146</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 43.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of revolution*, 13.

<sup>149</sup> In China, he used pseudonym Brode.

<sup>150</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China*, 49.

At the end of the Russian Civil War, thousands of Russian officers and soldiers who had participated in the White movement fled to China after the communist victory. They had combat experience and were well trained. During the Civil War in China, their skills were in high demand. Four thousand White Guards, called “white honghuzi,”<sup>151</sup> served under the command of General Nechaev in the army of Shandong governor Zhang Zongchang. Zhang Zuolin, the warlord ruler of Manchuria and sworn enemy of Feng Yuxiang, hired three thousand Russian soldiers and officers. Russian units were in such high demand with Chinese warlords that there was competition between Russian emigrants to form new units.<sup>152</sup>

It was an unpleasant surprise for Soviet officers to find out that Feng Yuxiang, in whose army they would work, employed a unit of White Guards as well. Thus, Soviet advisers had to cooperate with their former enemies. Chief adviser Primakov spoke ill of White Guards serving in China, mentioning that White Guards were used to suppress workers’ protests in Shanghai. He wrote that White emigrants fought very well, but only when promised a good plunder:

Usually after they captured a city it was given for them for several days to loot and rape. The dens of Shanghai and Tianjin supplied the manpower for the White Guard units, almost all White emigrants were infected with syphilis and prone to all vices of a big city. They left their mistresses, fallen Russian women, in port cities, where the latter were working as prostitutes. And in the name of those ... fallen women White mercenaries robbed and burned Chinese cities.<sup>153</sup>

Primakov’s description of White Guards was inconsistent because he stated that White Guards’ units had “very strict discipline,” but on the next page he described them as “unshaven, with overgrown dirty beards.”<sup>154</sup> Primakov’s writings have ideological bias but indicate his hostile relations to former compatriots.

Feng had a unit of one hundred and fifty White Guards under command of Colonel Alexander Gushchin. Soviet advisers planned to use this detachment as a main striking force of the National Peoples’ Army and to entice White Russians from armies of other warlords. After

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<sup>151</sup> *Honghuzi* is a Chinese word for robbers and bandits in the areas of the eastern Russia-China borderland.

<sup>152</sup> Usov, *Sovietskaya Razvedka v Kitaye (Soviet Intelligence in China)*, 63-64.

<sup>153</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer’s Diaries)*, 169.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

reforming the detachment, advisers concluded that it was necessary to send five White Guards to the USSR, probably for training and indoctrination. To raise discipline and strengthen Soviet influence, advisers decided to execute a couple of White Guards, who were enemy spies.<sup>155</sup> Eight months after the formation of the Gushchin company, the goal to attract other White Guard troops who served in warlords' armies was still not achieved. Among two hundred and twenty soldiers and officers there were twelve Koreans and thirty-six Soviet citizens. Gushchin's unit attracted only "the worst element of emigration." 17% of soldiers were illiterate, 30% semi-literate, 3% had primary education, 14% had never served in the army before, and 5% have served in an army less than a year. In 1926, when Gushchin's company finally expanded to include approximately two hundred White Guards, fifty-one Red Army soldiers and non-commissioned officers were added to it to ensure Soviet control over the unit. However, the presence of Gushchin's detachment in the troops of Feng became a problem because the detachment lacked discipline: "there was drunkenness, quarrels, debauches, unauthorized absence and beating of civilians."<sup>156</sup> Thus, Gushchin's company were able to attract only least qualified White Guard soldiers and officers among those who served in China. As a consequence, the fighting ability of the unit was very low.

Apart from causing problems and failing to achieve its goals, the detachment of the White Guards in the army of Feng Yuxiang was against the ideological values of Soviet advisers. The necessity to work with former enemies was arguably bad for the group's morale. Soviet documents do not provide much information about this, but clearly demonstrate that advisers tried to get rid of some White Guards (either killing them or sending them to the USSR) or to add more Soviet citizens to it to ensure control. This shows deep mistrust that Soviet officers felt for their new allies. It was politically insensitive for Feng to use the services of White emigrants while requesting Soviet help. It showed the lack of trust and coldness in relations between Feng and the USSR.

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<sup>155</sup> Grisha, Letter to Seifulin, March 2, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 59.

<sup>156</sup> Sergey Balmasov, *White emigres on the military service in China* (Moscow: Centrepoligraf, 2007), 570.

The use of Christian religion for indoctrination in Feng Yuxiang's army caused another ideological conflict between him and Soviet advisers. Feng became interested in Christianity at young age. He attended the Methodist Church classes where he studied the Bible and later became a Christian. Alexey Blagodatov wrote that Feng Yuxiang was brought to Christianity by famous missionary Liu Feng, who became his godfather. An important role in Feng's conversion in Christianity was played by Li Dequan, a beautiful Christian girl, whom Feng loved and later married. Feng found Christianity very useful for maintaining his army's discipline.<sup>157</sup> During his military service in Changde in Hunan province, Feng Yuxiang actively converted his soldiers and officers to the Christian faith. He introduced to his army daily church services, Sunday prayers and Bible study classes. Prayer was used as a method of spiritual training.<sup>158</sup> Whether Feng was a devoted Christian or used the religion to strengthen his army is an open question. Some historians, like Dan Jacobs, the author of the biography of Mikhail Borodin, believe in the latter. Jacobs calls Feng Yuxiang "the so-called Christian general, who once baptized his troops en masse with a firehose,"<sup>159</sup> thus showing Feng's pragmatic attitude to Christianity.<sup>160</sup> Chief adviser Primakov said that Feng was different from other warlords, only because he had "a touch of Christian liberalism."<sup>161</sup>

Primakov was not the only Soviet adviser who did not like Feng's affection towards Christianity. Feng's use of Christianity as an ideology to indoctrinate his troops was against the ideological principles of all Soviet officers and specialists who were serving as his advisers. During the period from 1921 to 1928 the Soviet government conducted an anti-religious campaign in the USSR. The Soviet Union was the first state to have the elimination of religion as an ideological objective. The Communist regime confiscated church property, ridiculed religion,

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<sup>157</sup> Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitayskoy revolyutsii 1925-1927* (Notes about Chinese revolution, 1925-1927), 37.

<sup>158</sup> Vladimir G. Datsyshen, *Christianity in China: History and Modernity* (Moscow: Scientific and educational forum on international relations, 2007), 31.

<sup>159</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 164.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer's Diaries)*, 187.

harassed believers, and propagated atheism in the schools.<sup>162</sup> The elimination of religion and its replacement with atheism supported by a materialist world view was a fundamental ideological goal of the state.<sup>163</sup> Vladimir Lenin compared religion with a drug that keeps people docile: “Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.”<sup>164</sup> That is why Soviet advisers were hostile to the use of religion in the army and to priests and missionaries who spread it.

In fact, missionaries were Soviet advisors’ competitors in the field of ideological propaganda. According to a political adviser in Feng’s army, S. Naumov,<sup>165</sup> upon their arrival in the National Peoples’ Army, they immediately understood that there was no ideological education in the army except Christianity. Each unit had missionary groups, soldiers woke up early in the morning with prayers and went to sleep singing psalms. With the help of missionaries Feng instilled his soldiers with the principles of Christian morality. When chief adviser Putna introduced Naumov and his colleagues to Feng as specialists in political agitation, Feng answered: “Oh, you want to educate our soldiers? Actually, we already have someone doing this job.” Then he summoned three pastors and announced that “these people are doing the work you want to do.” Naumov immediately realized that it meant that Feng did not need their services. Feng needed communication, artillery and infantry advisers but not political workers.<sup>166</sup>

Missionaries’ influence in the army was very strong, and they were part of the inner circle of some prominent senior officers. On several occasions, Soviet advisers disapprovingly mentioned in their reports that one of Feng’s most influential generals, Governor Zhang Zhijiang, “is too much intoxicated with Christianity, attributes everything to the God’s will, ...

<sup>162</sup> Library of Congress, “Anti-Religious Campaigns in the USSR”, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/anti.html> (accessed 7 December 2017).

<sup>163</sup> Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-Religious Policies, vol. 1, A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), 34.

<sup>164</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Socialism and Religion,” *Novaya Zhizn*, no. 28, (December 1905). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/dec/03.htm> (accessed 7 December 2017).

<sup>165</sup> Full name unknown, in all available sources, including his reminiscences, he is referred to as S. Naumov.

<sup>166</sup> S. Naumov, “In the Army of Feng Yuxiang,” in *Na kitaiskoy zemle: vospominaniya sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev 1925 – 1945* (On Chinese Land: Memories of Soviet Volunteers 1925 – 1945), ed. Yuri Chudodeev (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 35.

surrounded himself with missionaries. Division Commander Tong Linge did the same. Both of them plan to save China with the help of Christianity.”<sup>167</sup> It was Zhang’s idea to organize missionary groups in Feng’s army. He usually prayed three times a day, in times of war – even more.<sup>168</sup> During the Tianjing operation he organized special church service where he prayed for the “help of the heaven,” and after the capture of Tianjing organized a parade and served a solemn prayer service on the day of Christmas in gratitude for the victory.<sup>169</sup>

Zhang Zhijiang was heavily criticized by Soviet advisors, and he was given the following characteristics: “None of his actions deserve any attention. When Feng was in Kalgan he listened only to Feng. After Feng left he is copying Feng. His beliefs are narrow patriotism, left to him by Feng, and strong and deep religiosity.”<sup>170</sup> Primakov wrote that Zhang did not follow traditions of the National Peoples’ Army – he lived in luxury, had two wives and three concubines. However, it did not prevent him from pretending to be a zealous Christian.<sup>171</sup> In the same report advisers gave very positive characteristics of several KMT members and especially noted that none of them “believed in Christianity” as if it was high praise.<sup>172</sup>

On 18 March 1926, during an anti-warlord and anti-imperialist demonstration in Beijing, police opened fire on protesters. Soviet advisers were outraged by this event and demanded that the Commander of the Beijing Garrison, Li Mingzhong, arrest President Duan Qirui, who ordered the suppression of the protesters. When Li refused to do anything, advisers compared him to Pontius Pilate, pointing out the fact that the general was Christian and shaming him for not doing anything.<sup>173</sup> When Feng Yuxiang decided to retire from his post of the commander of the army, adviser Primakov tried to convince him that he was wrong by stating that “To quit is to

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<sup>167</sup> Maisky, Letter to Trifonov, February 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 43.

<sup>168</sup> “Kharakteristika Starshikh Ofitserov Fena (Characteristics of Feng’s senior officers)” in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 181.

<sup>169</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer’s Diaries)*, 161.

<sup>170</sup> “Kharakteristika Starshikh Ofitserov Fena (Characteristics of Feng’s senior officers)” in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 181.

<sup>171</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer’s Diaries)*, 55.

<sup>172</sup> “Kharakteristika Starshikh Ofitserov Fena (Characteristics of Feng’s senior officers)” in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 181.

<sup>173</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer’s Diaries)*, 178.

act as Pontius Pilate”, implying that as a Christian Feng should know that his nonparticipation would lead to tragic consequences.<sup>174</sup>

It was hard for Soviet advisers and Feng Yuxiang to reach mutual understanding because they held totally different points of view on most fundamental things such as politics and ideology. Though they officially proclaimed that both the USSR and Feng Yuxiang have common political goals and similar ideological views, in reality their ideology and political values were very different and often contradicted each other. The resulting lack of trust and inability to achieve full cooperation between Feng and Soviet officers made advisers’ work almost impossible and nullified any humble progress that they managed to achieve.

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<sup>174</sup> “Razgovor Fena s Linom (Feng’s conversation with Ling)”, January 2, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 28.



## Chapter Three

### Internal and Interpersonal Factors for the Soviet Mission's Failure

Political and ideological contradictions of Soviet advisers with Feng Yuxiang and other commanders in his National People's Armies were the main causes of their mission's failure. However, there were two kinds of crucial factors that contributed to the failure. General factors include the split between the KMT and Communists, about which the advisers could do nothing. Specific factors include internal problems in the advisers' group, which could have been overcome by the Soviet agents, but instead impeded their work. While the general factors have been thoroughly examined by previous studies, the specific factors have long been neglected.

Indeed, many scholars who have written about Soviet-Chinese relations have made macro-examinations of the relations between countries and political parties. In these studies, politics and ideology are main factors, but specific factors at the individual level are excluded. Internal factors for the Soviet advisers' groups, such as poor organization of advisers' work that resulted in advisers' lack of understanding of mission's goals, insufficient preparation of the mission for work in a foreign country caused cultural problems on the personal level, internal conflicts and so on, also affected Soviet advisers' everyday work and contributed directly to their mission's failure.

#### *Personnel and Organizational Problems in the Mission*

Because of the tense revolutionary situation in China, the northern group of Soviet advisers was deployed very quickly on April 7, 1925. Even one-week delay was considered unacceptable. Consequently, no one was sent to China to prepare for the arrival of the group. A hasty selection of advisers was followed by a hasty preparation for their organization. Thus, the Soviet mission to Feng Yuxiang's army suffered from the lack of personnel and organizational preparation from the beginning.

The mission was supposed to be kept in secret, but not only did the majority of the group not know how to keep the secret, even the authorities responsible for sending the group did not know conditions of transportation abroad or the procedure for obtaining a visa in Chinese embassy in Moscow. As a result, the whole group of advisers disguised themselves to be businessmen, arrived together in the embassy without any required documents, and their applications were declined. They had to come again with the documents, and then travelled in a railcar that was added to the train especially for them, attracting much attention.<sup>175</sup> Their documents for “businessmen” had stamps of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR, and thus they faced a somewhat awkward situation on the border. Moscow supervisors of the mission had no idea about what was needed to travel to China through Mongolia. Therefore, the group’s arrival in Manchuria was noticed by both Chang Zuolin’s and Japanese intelligence. All these mistakes could be easily avoided if decisions about the mission were made more carefully and not in such a hurry. When the group arrived in Beijing they found out that no effort to maintain secrecy of the mission was made there either.<sup>176</sup> Two or three hotels crowded by Soviet “businessmen” attracted a lot of attention.<sup>177</sup>

Soviet advisers, including the group’s head, General Vitovt Putna, knew nothing about Feng’s army. There was no specific agreement with Feng about the group’s aims and structure, nor was there any clear understanding of the group’s job. Putna sent requests to his superiors in Beijing, but they were unable to provide any guidelines to help start the group’s work. The Soviet embassy’s lack of a clear understanding of Feng’s army, its needs, and the expectations of Feng himself made all Soviet efforts at the first period of work fruitless.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Alexandrov, “The Soviet Union’s Assistance to National Armies in Northern China in 1925-1927,” 134.

<sup>176</sup> Anders (Nikolay Korneev), “Tekhnika otpravki gruppi (The Procedure of Sending the Group)” in “Kollektsiya dokumentov po istorii revolyutsii v Kitaye (1922-1926) (Collection of documents on the history of the revolution in China (1922-1926))”, Collection 627 “Collection of documents on activities of Soviet diplomats, military and political advisors in China”, Vol. 17, 209, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), Moscow, Russia.

<sup>177</sup> Anders, “Gruppa v Pekine (The Group in Beijing)” in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 210.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Thus, Soviet advisers had to find clues to their future work by themselves through practical considerations. The Soviet advisers started developing different plans and programs, but all of them stalled because, from the very beginning, no one considered the most important factor: what Feng Yuxiang wanted from advisers. Feng was cautious and distrustful of the suddenly emerged group of foreigners, who persistently tried to find out his plans, intentions, and secrets of his army's higher command. The group did not know what Feng wanted, while Feng was suspicious and did not know what the advisers' true goal was. The lack of personnel and organizational preparations for the group's work, obscurity of its tasks, lack of guidance and understanding of the situation made advisers' work during this period almost impossible.<sup>179</sup>

General Putna's insistent demands for guidance from the Soviet Embassy in Beijing, rejection of different opinions from other advisers and his lack of visible success resulted in his quick replacement by Vitaliy Primakov in July 1925. However, the Soviet group's work under Putna's command could not be regarded as total failure. First, a considerable amount of theoretical work was done for the training of Feng's army; second, some information about Feng's army was obtained; third, advisers started some practical activities, and some of these actions had success. The more practical they were, the more success they had. Among the courses for senior officers' school, artillery school, cavalry school and construction of the armored train, Chinese commanders liked the latter two best, because they were innovative and immediately demonstrated practical usefulness.<sup>180</sup>

Because of the difference between Putna's and Primakov's personalities, the latter had a different view on the Soviet group's work. His main goal was to win the trust of the army commanders, to prove that advisers could and wanted to strengthen the National People's Army, even if they had to start with minor tasks. By that, Primakov rejected Putna's policy of seeking control over the army. Instead, he moved the focus towards practical work. In place of the

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<sup>179</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 165.

<sup>180</sup> Anders, "Rabota Gruppi pri Renjiange (Putne) (Group's Work under Renjiang (Putna))" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 212.

previous policy of “plans without work,” there was a new policy of “work at any cost, even without a plan.”<sup>181</sup> Any requests for help from any Chinese, whether Feng himself or any commander of the cavalry squadron, were satisfied. Advisers constantly tried to prove their skills and did any work that was welcomed. They took up a large range of responsibilities, from organizing different schools and courses to building armored trains and repairing armaments. In addition, advisers took part in all activities in the headquarters, such as Feng Yuxiang’s political work and inspection visits. Because of such broad engagements in various activities, advisers were unable to do any major work, like advising on general military and political organization of Feng’s army, and advisers and interpreters alike were overworked.<sup>182</sup>

The Soviet group of advisers did not have sufficient information about the nature of National People’s Army from the beginning, and so the group was sent there without regard to the actual needs of Feng Yuxiang. Feng and other commanders of the army were mostly interested in ammunition and arms supply. At the beginning, both sides did not trust each other, and to establish initial trust arms supply should have been the advisers’ priority, but it was not. Soviet instructors’ work was focused on the military schools and was done without coordination with the KMT, which meant that advisers lost significant political support.<sup>183</sup>

Incorrect estimation of the mission’s length was another problem for advisers. The Kalgan group of advisers was formed in Moscow in late March 1925. By that time, Soviet leaders were sure that the National Revolutionary Army in Guangzhou, together with Feng’s National Peoples’ Army in northern China, would start the military campaign to achieve the revolutionary goals of national unity and independence in one or two months. Thus, they assumed that Soviet advisers would lead the national liberation struggle to its quick success.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Anders, “Rabota Gruppi pri Zhenjiane (Putne)(Group’s Work under Renjiang (Putna)” in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 212.

<sup>183</sup> Fahron, February 12, 1926, Beijing, “Zakliucheniya po Povody Nashey Voennoi Sovetnicheskoi Rabote v Kitae (Conclusions about Our [Soviet] Military Advising Work in China)” in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 79.

Based on the short-term estimation for the revolutionary wars in China in that period, the term of the Soviet mission in Feng's army was planned to be from half a year to a year.<sup>184</sup>

Personnel selection of the prospective advisors was based on the estimated duration of the mission. General Vitovt Putna, the first head of the mission,<sup>185</sup> and his subordinates were not informed about the possibility of long and complicated work in China. On the contrary, the briefness of the mission was strongly emphasized, along with the necessity of intensive short-term work.<sup>186</sup> Understandably, most of the advisers who joined the group did not decide to devote their life to China or study Chinese culture, but saw this mission as a brief break from their work in the Red Army to take part in a hard revolutionary work in a country they had only the general idea about. For most advisers the mission to China was just a random episode of their career. It can be confirmed by the following fact: only two members of the group learned English before assignment, and only one of the two learned Chinese.<sup>187</sup>

The formation of the group for short-term work predetermined its inability to work for a long time. As the mission was supposed to be accomplished in a year or less, advisers did not take their families, and they even were not supposed to correspond with their family members.<sup>188</sup> Advisers' families received allowances, and those living in the residence provided by state were guaranteed housing. Because of insufficient funding these guarantees were possible only if it was a short-term assignment. Therefore, the idea that members of the mission would return not later than in one year was the main idea of the mission. Unexpectedly long separation from their families, and the perspective of spending a year or more in a foreign country without visiting Russia, delivered a blow to the advisers' morale.<sup>189</sup>

Advisers' life in China was full of danger and the prolonged time of service in China meant significantly higher risks. There were constant threats, especially when they travelled:

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<sup>184</sup> Anders, "Doklad ob Organizacii kalganskoi Grupi i yeyo Raboti (Report about Organization of the Kalgan Group and its Work)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 208.

<sup>185</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927*, 15.

<sup>186</sup> Anders, "O Formirovanii Gruppi (About the Formation of the Group)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 208.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Anders, "Tekhnika otpravki gruppi (The Procedure of Sending the Group)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 209.

from bandits, Japanese military, White Guards – refugee Russians who had fought against communists in the Civil war and after defeat had fled to China. Vishnyakova-Akimova tells that some advisors from the Kalgan group died on duty. One of her friends, Balk, “a handsome fellow,” got blood poisoning at the front near Tianjin and died two days later, while “very young and cheerful Vikhrev” was killed by bandits in Mongolian desert when he was returning from an assignment in Ulan Bator. When Vishnyakova-Akimova and her colleagues were travelling to Kalgan from Russia via Beijing, Japanese soldiers killed two Chinese communists in their train compartment. While her group stayed for a night in Beijing, a group of armed White Guards broke in their hotel room. However, when they found out that Soviet advisers were also armed, the White Guards retreated.<sup>190</sup>

Advisers who arrived in Feng’s army through Beijing could consider themselves lucky. Some Soviet officers, especially those in charge of weapons transportation, arrived through Mongolia. This route from the USSR to the territories controlled by Feng in Northern China was used for the shipment of arms and was extremely difficult. Prominent Chinese communist Deng Xiaoping, who used to work as political instructor in Feng’s army, made the journey from the USSR to China through this route. Train from Moscow ran only as far as Verkhneudinsk (now Ulan Ude), from there Deng and his fellow communist students proceeded across the Mongolian steppe and through the city of Urga (now Ulan Bator) in Soviet trucks that were transporting weapons to Feng’s army. Then they crossed the Gobi Desert on camels and finally rode on horseback from Yinchuan to Xi’an, where they were appointed to work. It was a difficult journey: cold in the steppe and hot in the desert; dust storms blinded them and choked their mouths and noses with sand. Finally, when the tired and bedraggled students from Moscow arrived in Xi’an, they were dressed in rags.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China. 1925-1927*, 31, 130-131.

<sup>191</sup> Alexander Pantsov and Steven I. Levine, *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

The military units to which advisers were assigned frequently resented their presence. Chinese officers feared losing face if they accepted orders or even advice from Russian “underlings.” Blagodatov recalls that after the defeat of the Peoples’ National Armies in August 1926, Chinese soldiers attacked a small contingent of Soviet advisers, wounding two of them, one of whom died. During the same retreat other advisers’ horses were stolen by their own soldiers and the advisers had to retreat on foot in the face of the advancing enemy. Some advisers were wounded and left to the mercy of fate.<sup>192</sup> Three Soviet fliers lost their lives in Northern China.<sup>193</sup>

Advisers’ health was another concern. Even though the group was in China less than a year, many instructors faced serious health issues. Advisers worked in areas where there was a high chance of contracting typhus, dysentery, malaria, and cholera – and there was little medical care available. When in July 1925 general Alexey Blagodatov inspected the Kalgan group, he found out that 75 percent of advisers had dysentery, and some had to be sent back to the USSR.<sup>194</sup> Translator of the group Vishnyakova-Akimova reported that her colleagues often fell ill with malaria, amoebic dysentery, and other illnesses. “We all suffered from the skin and stomach disorders”, she recalled.<sup>195</sup>

The Soviet aviators, who flew and fought almost constantly during the military campaign of 1926, were exhausted. They had no medical centers nor even medical orderlies. “We are, particularly all of us, sick,” wrote aviation adviser Sergeev after the campaign. “Especially we complain about our nervous systems, hearts, and stomachs.”<sup>196</sup> Most Russians, who remained in China for an extended period, acquired illnesses that plagued them the rest of their lives. That is why very few advisers were willing to stay in China longer than several months.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China*, 130.

<sup>193</sup> Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitayskoy revolyutsii 1925-1927* (Notes about Chinese revolution, 1925-1927), 110, 235.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>195</sup> Vishnyakova-Akimova, *Two Years in the Revolutionary China*, 201.

<sup>196</sup> Vasilii Sergeev, “Report of Senior Aviation Adviser of the NRA Sergeev on the Action of Aviation in the northern Expedition.” March 1, 1927, Canton. In *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1959, 4, 130.

<sup>197</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 155.

The constant threat to advisers' lives was aggravated by poor conditions of living that some of the advisers and translators experienced. Living conditions of advisers in China often left much to be desired. Most advisers lived in Kalgan, where Feng had his headquarters. Kalgan was a frontier town located beside the Great Wall. It was bitter cold in winter, and the town often suffered from dust storms blowing in from the Gobi Desert. Advisers lived on the outskirts of Kalgan, in quarters without running water or plumbing. Rooms were always cold despite cast-iron stoves that were kept constantly burning. Yellow dust from the storms were covering everything, creating a depressive atmosphere.<sup>198</sup> In Tianjin four officers had to live in a room measuring five by twelve feet, and advisers Sergeev and Radkevich slept on the floor on one mattress.<sup>199</sup>

Advisers had to travel a lot and their living conditions varied greatly from town to town. Sometimes they slept in comfort, but most of the time they stayed in schools, police stations, or aboard boats. Once they arrived in a village after sundown and were told that there was no place to stay other than an old temple. They had to spend a night there, among a century's accumulated dirt, mold and cobwebs. One of the advisers remarked that even in such conditions they felt more secure and comfortable than in some unhospitable communities.<sup>200</sup>

Length of service in foreign country presented an urgent problem for the Kalgan group of advisers, and the group required reinforcements to accomplish the proposed plan of work. The majority of advisers were not ready to extend the time of their service in China. After several months they were still working with all their energy, but more and more were looking forward to returning to the motherland. The mission's leaders were expecting that failure to get timely replacement would immediately cause a decline of the group's spirit, indifference to work and moral decay. At first the least tenacious members of the team would be affected, and then the

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<sup>198</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of revolution*, 10.

<sup>199</sup> Krauze, Letter to Seifulin №34, February 20, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 28, p. 10.

<sup>200</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 220.



majority. A new resolution of about two-years of service, that was issued by mission's superiors at the beginning of the 1926, seriously affected the morale of the Soviet advisers.<sup>201</sup>

First, the condition of two-year service was not declared during the group formation, and second, most important, was the fact that morale could not be controlled by resolutions. If advisers would be forced to follow a resolution, they should still be replaced, but it negatively affected the group's work and their professional reputation.<sup>202</sup> Replacement was divided into two categories: "immediately" or "by April" 1926, but the advisers who did not occupy any position could be sent to the USSR without replacement. Members who arrived in China after the core group were not supposed to be replaced. According to the group's supervisors, successful advisory work in China required long-term service, at least five years.

Voronin and other officers in charge of advisers' groups hoped that group reorganization could help to eliminate negative elements, like the group's moral decay and some discipline issues. However, better management was not enough to restore discipline, and "harsh punitive measures" were required. All commanders were to be provided with real disciplinary power according to their ranks, and special military courts were to be organized to punish the guilty in China. Special courts in China were necessary to quickly restore the discipline, because the military courts in the USSR could never take into account the specifics of the situation in China and would judge according to their standards. A minor misconduct by the USSR standards could be a serious offence in China. When a case was transferred from China to the USSR it effectively resulted in impunity and being sent to the USSR became a reward rather than a punishment.<sup>203</sup>

The random selection of the groups' members was a major mistake; their qualities and quantity did not meet actual needs. Advisers were selected by People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs of the USSR, Mikhail Frunze, according to his personal preferences without

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<sup>201</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of Revolution*, 10.

<sup>202</sup> Makedonsky, "O Nashey Voennoi Rabote (About Our Military Work [in Feng Yuxiang's Army])", January 12, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 9.

<sup>203</sup> Anders, "Poriadok Sluzhbi v Kitae (About Service Terms in China)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 227.

any regards of a person's merits and expertise.<sup>204</sup> Selection of the groups' commanders also was incoherent: they were either good political workers, but bad military specialists, or good military specialists with weak political assistants who did not understand the situation. Weak heads of staff could not organize the systematic analysis of the situation. An acute shortage of translators often paralyzed the whole working process. There was no clear understanding of what kind of relations should be inside the groups. Sometimes there was strict subordination, sometimes familiarity. Groups divided into factions: "favorites", "exploited", "undesirables", etc. Relations between groups and their Beijing command were also unclear. There was no understanding of the course of the political work.<sup>205</sup> Without proper guidance political work in Feng's army was almost impossible. But even when advisers had some political goals, it was hard for them to achieve them due to bad or lacking communication with officers of the Peoples' National Army.

Difficulties for the Soviet advisors' situation could have been improved by competent guidance from the Soviet authorities in Beijing. However, the ambassador and the military attaché, who oversaw the group, were not able to provide coherent guidance and were very preoccupied with internal conflicts in the embassy.

The embassy had very vague ideas about the situation in the group, its personnel, its needs, and its available funds. Not only did the embassy's military administration not have any coordination with the advisors' group, but the military attaché did not have any coordination with the ambassador.<sup>206</sup> All of this affected the advisors' group, which did not have any incentive to maintain staff work on the high level in Feng Yuxiang's army, because all of their work was wasted.<sup>207</sup> To a large extent, Advisers' unsatisfactory work on the eve of the Tianjin operation was the fault of the Soviet embassy in Beijing, because it could not give initial guidance to the group, set tasks, or articulate what it was required to do.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Blagodatov, *Zapiski o kitayskoy revolyutsii* (Notes about Chinese revolution, 1925-1927), 16.

<sup>205</sup> Fahron, "Zakliucheniya o Nashey Voennoi Sovetnicheskoy Rabote v Kitae (Conclusions About Our Military Advising Work in China)", February 12, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 81.

<sup>206</sup> "Rol' Pekina (The role of Beijing [Embassy])" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 220.

<sup>207</sup> "Pervii Guominczun i Feng (The First Guominjun and Feng)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 221.

<sup>208</sup> Anders, "Doklad o Tekushey Obstanovke (Report About the Current Situation)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 219.

Alongside the embassy there was the military attaché, but he was not a subordinate of the ambassador, and instead had a position at least of a front commander. To stress his special status, the position of military attaché was given to authoritative individuals. For all military workers the military attaché was the figure equal to the ambassador and even financially independent from him.<sup>209</sup> The Soviet military attaché had several functions: systematical analysis of Chinese military and political situation for Soviet leadership to make decisions; supervision and management of advisers' groups; and usage of advisers' work to increase Soviet political influence. However, after the advisers' mission worked in Feng Yuxiang's army for years, there are no records of any positive examples of the military attaché's work.<sup>210</sup>

The administration of the military attaché had too wide a range of different responsibilities, and due to the disorganization and uncertainty of its functions, its work was chaotic and spontaneous. His employees were overworked, always in a hurry, and could not perform systematic work. As a result, work was wasted, countless stacks of paperwork were accumulated, and continuous and systematic supervision of subordinates was clearly lacking in regard to the advisers' group. The military attaché and his administration not only tried to perform his direct military responsibilities, but also were engaged in Chinese politics. As a result, his management of advisers' groups was unsatisfactory. He was sometimes interfering in the work of the Soviet group of advisors, but sometimes totally forgot about them. The groups' response was to follow their own initiatives in most circumstances.<sup>211</sup>

In such situations, a good working environment can be achieved by moral subordination of one official to another inside the Soviet embassy. At the beginning this dual-power situation was not a significant problem, because military attaché Anatoly Gekker was not very ambitious. When his post was taken over by Nikolay Voronin, a person with a strong personality as the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Fahron, "Doklad o Roli i Rabote Voennogo Attashe (Report About the Role and Work of the Military Attaché)" in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 61.

<sup>211</sup> "Rol' Pekina (The Role of Beijing [Embassy])" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 220.

ambassador Lev Karakhan, it started to affect military and political work of the advisers' group.<sup>212</sup>

As a result of the struggle for power, the ambassador and the military attaché were unable to combine both their functions or tried to concentrate all power in their hands and use advisers as a means that could achieve some results quickly.<sup>213</sup> But in reality, the results were unsatisfactory. It was caused by a poor understanding of the situation, biased views, and attempts to consider a situation out of its context by these Soviet bureaucrats. Little can be said about the work of the first military attaché Anatoly Gekker, mainly because nothing is left of his military and political work: no analysis of the situation in China, no descriptions or evaluations of existed conditions, etc. The time of his work was wasted; everything had to be started from the beginning as if no work at all was done. Meanwhile, witnesses said that Gekker planned to do a large amount of necessary work, but he was set in such abnormal conditions that he could not implement his plans.<sup>214</sup>

Nikolay Voronin, who replaced Gekker as military attaché and under whose supervision the advisers' work started, could not and did not try to perform his duties properly. There was no management of the group's work at all. Not just big issues, even small technical, economical, and administrative problems were not solved for weeks or even months. Head of Kaifeng advisers' detachment Georgy Skalov<sup>215</sup> wrote in his diaries that they had not received any orders from Beijing for five months, and they were used to it. It seems that Voronin focused more on the political sphere of China in general, and the groups were left on their own. He "tried not to irritate" advisers and gave them freedom of action, and when they kept asking for instructions

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Fahren, "Doklad o Roli i Rabote Voennogo Attashe (Report About the Role and Work of the Military Attaché)" in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 61.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>215</sup> Used penname Sinani.

they did not receive any. During his visits to Feng Yuxiang's army Voronin avoided giving any orders to advisers.<sup>216</sup>

Voronin also did nothing to push the National People's Army into a united front in the coming war with Zhang Zuolin. From the beginning, he was so sure that the National Peoples' Army was solid and fully controlled by Feng that he made no reports to Moscow about the actual state of affairs. That Voronin was wrong was obvious during the visit of Soviet officials to Kaifeng in September-October 1925. They stated that Feng's army was decentralized and that he did not have absolute control over it.<sup>217</sup>

Because of this lack of communication, during the Anti-Fengtian war of 1925-1926 the Second National Peoples' Army "did not go where it should go." The Soviet administration in Beijing was angry and tried to influence it through Feng Yuxiang, but Feng complained to Primakov that "Second army does not obey him" and asked Beijing to influence it because "it was not clear who gives the orders". Under such conditions it was impossible for advisers to control the situation or influence it.<sup>218</sup>

### *Interpersonal Conflicts and the Soviet Mission's Failure*

Due largely to the lack of careful personnel and organizational preparation, it was very hard for the Soviet advisors to fully understand Chinese culture and establish good interpersonal communication with senior officers in Feng Yuxiang's army at the beginning. Advisers worked as if they were still commanders in the Red Army and issued orders to Chinese officers instead of trying to persuade them. As a result, Soviet advisers' recommendations were often rejected, and sometimes Chinese officers refused to listen to their recommendations, tried to avoid advisers, and even failed to inform advisers of military situations.<sup>219</sup> There were several reasons

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<sup>216</sup> Fahron, "Doklad o Roli i Rabote Voennogo Attashe (Report About the Role and Work of the Military Attaché)" in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 63.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>219</sup> Anders, "Rabota Gruppi pri Line (Primakove) (Group's work under Ling (Primakov))" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 214.

for this on the Chinese side. Outside people were seen as a burden, especially when Feng's officers did not have time for discussions. Generals and officers, who have not met advisers before, did not trust them. Nonetheless, the fact that advisers were giving advice in the same manner they gave orders and insisted on their execution, sometimes rudely, and tried to issue commands to people who considered themselves commanders, did not result in good relations with Chinese officers.<sup>220</sup>

Most important, despite the fact that the Soviet group had influence on military school students, officers, some generals and even Feng Yuxiang himself, it failed to win the trust of most high-ranking commanders – *dutuns* (都统) and candidates for *dutuns*. These commanders were real owners of the military units under their control and were intermediaries between Feng and the troops. They were the most conservative and the least interested in changes to the army. Many of them even considered the Soviet advisers as spies, or as agents of Feng trying to limit their own power.<sup>221</sup>

These commanders played a huge role in the army's life, and even Feng could not do anything against their will. Feng wanted to increase the strength of his army and his control over it. High commanders, however, wanted to keep the army in a decentralized state for the sake of their own power. Anders compared the situation to the struggle between the king and his feudal lords.<sup>222</sup> Any innovative technique and practice in military training would require consolidation of the army, but high commanders were hostile to innovations and especially to consolidation of their military units under the Soviet instructors and Feng himself. Their goal was consolidation of their personal power and of the financial resources to maintain it.<sup>223</sup> The crucial task that could lead to success in strengthening the army would be the elimination of power of these high

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<sup>220</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 143.

<sup>221</sup> Anders, "Rabota Gruppi vo Vremia Voennikh Deistviy (Group's Work During the Wartime)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 215.

<sup>222</sup> Anders, "Pervii Guomincziun' i Fen (The First Guominjun and Feng)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 223.

<sup>223</sup> McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*, 267.

commanders and liquidation of their autonomy. However, that task was not possible for the military advisers group to achieve.<sup>224</sup>

High commanders exerted a strong influence on Feng. It was possible that, in large part, his cautious attitude towards Soviet advisers was caused by these commanders, but Feng was not ready to exclude them from the army's high command. This feudal remnant, the advisers initially thought, existed in Feng's army only nominally. In reality, advisers still had much less influence than they expected, mostly because they did not take the power of these high commanders seriously.<sup>225</sup> Even the First division of the National People's Army, the most centralized unit of the military forces under personal control of Feng Yuxiang, was constrained by the power of the high commanders, which complicated all actions of the army. The battle for Tianjin during the Anti-Fengtian war of 1925-1926 showed an inability of the higher commanders to use the military units trained by advisers, a lack of coordination between different kinds of troops, and a suppression of the initiative from their subordinates.<sup>226</sup>

Soviet advisers' relations with *dutuns* were very strained.<sup>227</sup> High commanders would not participate in banquettes that were attended by Soviet advisers, and even a host, Zhang Zhijiang, was absent. Zhang always had a cool attitude towards advisers. They were not warned about the upcoming operation against Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin and were not invited to take part in the planning of the operation. When the National People's Army was in danger during the operation, Chinese commanders did not want to use Soviet services until the situation became dire. Feng's commanders tried to prevent the Soviet advisers from doing serious work, leaving them only technical duties as training instructors.<sup>228</sup> Apparently, the anti-imperialist

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<sup>224</sup> Anders, "Pervii Guomincziun' i Fen (The First Guominjun and Feng)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 223.

<sup>225</sup> Anders, "Rabota Gruppi vo Vremia Voennikh Deistviy (Group's Work During the Wartime)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 215.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>227</sup> Primakov, *Zapisky Volontera (Volunteer's Diaries)*, 56.

<sup>228</sup> Anders, "Doklad o Tekuschei Obstanovke (Report About the Current Situation)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 219.

demonstrations that took place in Beijing in November 1925 frightened not only Feng, but his subordinate generals as well, and they wanted to distance themselves from foreigners.<sup>229</sup>

The strained relations forced the military attaché in the Soviet embassy of Beijing to issue a special order to his subordinates to radically change the style of their work to preserve achieved authority and connections with Feng and senior officers. Advisers used to view themselves not only as advisers, but as “commanders of commanders.” All advisers’ opinions were offered for consideration as orders rather than advice. Instructors, while giving advice, used to rudely criticize and reject the ideas of Chinese officers.<sup>230</sup> If their proposal was rejected, some advisers tended to become outraged and talk about the stupidity of their Chinese counterparts. Restraint, absolute loyalty, and tactfulness in relations with Chinese partners were made mandatory for every adviser under threat of punishment.<sup>231</sup>

When the war with Zhang Zuolin broke out in 1925, the three advisers and two translators who were with the Feng’s staff in Kaifeng were only notified about the beginning of the hostilities two days later, when the army they “helped to command” had long left for the frontlines. Feng’s chief of staff Lu Ji did not want to take them to frontline and agreed to do so only because general Georgy Skalov, chief Soviet officer in Kaifeng, insisted on it. The chief of staff commented: “You can go, but we are not very interested in you coming with us.”<sup>232</sup> Advisers had no other choice but to leave. When their translator Liang was receiving a pass from the secretary, the latter rudely said: “Why a foreigner needs a pass [sic]? Can’t he buy a ticket?” Liang answered that Soviet advisors did not mind the money and that they had money for the tickets, but that he needed a paper for an unobstructed passage. Liang reported that these verbal attacks on the Soviet group were common.<sup>233</sup> General Skalov was not able to send reports about

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<sup>229</sup> Sinani (Georgy Skalov), “Doklad o Gruppe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report About the 2nd Army’s Advisers Group)”, December 13, 1925, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 1.

<sup>230</sup> Makedonsky, Letter to Ling and Sinani №8, December 21, 1925, in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 19.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Sinani, “Doklad o Gruppe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report About the 2nd Army’s Advisers Group)”, December 13, 1925, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 2.

<sup>233</sup> Makhochkin, “Zapiska o Vazhnosti Lichnikh Otnosheniy v Rabote Sovetnikov (Note About the Importance of Personal Relations in Adviser’s Work)”, January 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 9.



the warfare to the Soviet embassy in Beijing, because for two days the army's authorities did not allow him to send his telegraphs. By the time Sinai received Feng Yuxiang's permission to send the telegram, his reports had been delivered by mail, so there was no need for the telegraph.<sup>234</sup>

In such conditions, advisers could not continue their work in the Peoples' National Army. As the head of the advisers' staff in Kalgan Nikolay Korneev described this situation. They were in the awkward "position of a passenger, who missed his train," and were contemplating whether they should continue their fruitless visits to Feng's headquarters or buy tickets to Beijing. Most of the time advisors just had to be patient and pretend they did not understand hints from the Chinese command that it would be better for them to leave.<sup>235</sup>

However, attitude to advisers varied greatly depending on the advisers' expertise. For example, their attitude towards the Soviet group's engineers was completely different. While a mechanical engineer was allowed to work, a chemical engineer was not even allowed to enter the factory. As a result, the group commanders had to send chemical engineers away, but mechanical and ammunition engineers were transferred under the authority of Feng Yuxiang to work in the Kaifeng arsenal.<sup>236</sup>

In addition to strained relations with their Chinese partners, Soviet advisers were unable to understand Chinese realities that were completely foreign to them, and that puzzled them greatly. For example, adviser Makhochkin wrote with surprise in one of his reports that rank itself doesn't necessary give a commander authority. The authority of the commander was closely associated with the respect he inspired in others. It was fatal for a Chinese officer to lose face. Face could be lost in different situations: if a person let his subordinate sit or if he is sitting together with his subordinates; if he answered a question too quickly; even to show pity to a subordinate. All decisions should be made slowly. A person should be able to chat about small

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<sup>234</sup> Sinani, "Doklad o Gruppe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report About the 2nd Army's Advisers Group)", December 13, 1925, in Collection 627 Vol. 18, 3.

<sup>235</sup> Fahron, "Otsenka Nashey Voennoi i Politicheskoi Raboti v Kitae v 1925-1926 (Evaluation of Our Military and Political Work in China in 1925-1926)", February 5, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 38.

<sup>236</sup> Sinani, "Doklad o Gruppe Sovetnikov vo Vtoroi Armii (Report About the 2nd Army's Advisers Group)", December 13, 1925, in Collection 627 Vol. 18, 3.

things and occasionally mention important issues in the conversation. Chinese people expected their superiors to look important. If somebody is walking instead of going by car, or opened a door by himself, he was not considered as a supervisor, and nobody would pay attention to him.<sup>237</sup> Soviet advisers were not aware of such etiquette, and consequently they were often irritated by the attitude they received. There were high ranking officers and distinguished Soviet academics among the advisers, yet many Chinese they met assumed that they were merely foreign servants who were traveling with important Chinese people and treated them accordingly.<sup>238</sup>

It was hard for Soviet advisers to understand the systems of subordination in the National Peoples' Army. On 24 February 1926, advisers complained that they could not understand why the troops of the First National People's Army did not enter the battle when the Third National People's Army was retreating and needed help. After having a talk with staff officers, Soviet advisers still did not understand who was making operative decisions, such as ordering troops to attack. One person told him that it was *duban* Sun Yue, commander of the Third Peoples' Army. But another person said that it was general Lu Zuolin, and the third person told him that without permission of *duban* Zhang Zhijiang no decisions could be made. Advisers even failed to find out what strategic decision was made: to defend, to attack, or to leave Tianjin.<sup>239</sup>

Thus, they felt that in the conditions some "Europeanisation" of military and political thinking would bring invaluable benefits to Feng and his army. Advisers had little understanding how subordination in Chinese armies worked, and instead of figuring it out they should adopt a somewhat condescending attitude to their Chinese colleagues, considering them not "European" enough.<sup>240</sup>

Several advisers' reports and letters have common, almost superstitious motifs. Advisers noted that in their work they inevitably encountered some "incomprehensible" or "inexplicable"

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<sup>237</sup> Makhochkin, "Zapiska o Vazhnosti Litchnikh Otnosheniy v Rabote Sovetnikov (Note About the Importance of Personal Relations in Adviser's Work)", January 7, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 18, 10.

<sup>238</sup> Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China*, 220.

<sup>239</sup> Krauze, Letter to Seifulin №43, February 24, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 28, 19.

<sup>240</sup> Anders, "Doklad o Tekuschei Obstanovke (Report About the Current Situation)" in Collection 627, Vol. 17, 219.

phenomena that they called “Chinese reality.” In different situations, despite the equal qualifications of advisers, their work could have different outcomes. In some situations, personal factors were crucial for success, but in other situations they had no importance at all, and outcome would depend on some other factors.<sup>241</sup>

Primakov used this expression several times to explain failures and mistakes made by advisers in Feng’s army. The way he was talking about the “Chinese reality” was a bit unusual for a military man. It seems that the “Chinese reality” became a collective image of all cultural, political and ideological differences that advisers could not understand. Many advisers used the same methods that were successful in Russia but could not understand why they failed in China. They were not aware of the possible differences between Chinese and Russian realities, were shocked by the differences between Soviet Russia and China, of the ways people thought, communicated and acted, and felt frustrated with their inability to grasp and adjust to the “Chinese reality.” Thus, they referred to it as a mysterious force that sabotaged all their plans.<sup>242</sup>

However, despite “Chinese reality” being a complicated, confusing, and volatile phenomenon, it is still possible to find some patterns. Biased views and methods were most destructive for advisers’ work. When advisers tried to use their standard methods and failed, they always came to the same conclusion that they had to adjust to the existing realities instead of trying to change existing conditions. If they did not do that, they would fail. It is possible that “the ill-fated Chinese reality” was used as a convenient excuse to explain various failures and mistakes that occurred during the presence of Soviet advisers in Feng’s army. Primakov doubted that “Chinese reality” was a valid explanation for the fact that Soviet “advisers” (authors quotation marks) were still in an uncertain position after almost a year of work and fair efforts.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Fahron, “Otsenka Nashei Voennoi i Politicheskoi Raboti v Kitae v 1925-1926 (Evaluation of Our Military and Political Work in China in 1925-1926)”, February 5, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 38.

<sup>242</sup> Fahron, “Otsenka Nashei Voennoi i Politicheskoi Raboti v Kitae v 1925-1926 (Evaluation of Our Military and Political Work in China in 1925-1926)”, February 5, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 37.

<sup>243</sup> Fahron, “Otsenka Nashei Voennoi i Politicheskoi Raboti v Kitae v 1925-1926 (Evaluation of Our Military and Political Work in China in 1925-1926)”, February 5, 1926, in Collection 627, Vol. 15, 38.

Advisers' work in Feng Yuxiang's army was very complicated due to the latter's heterogeneity in composition and the changing political and military situations. However, it sometimes became much more difficult and even impossible because of some internal, cultural and personal factors. Soviet advisers were specially selected professionals who had a lot of experience and knowledge in their fields, but sometimes they were unable to transfer their knowledge to their Chinese partners simply because of the language barrier. Even when they were able to communicate with their Chinese counterparts, their bad personal relations made their efforts useless. Chinese officers did not want to listen to them, or were just not interested in their help, due in part to such personal and cultural misunderstandings.<sup>244</sup> The difficulty of the task was aggravated by the poor organization of the mission. Advisers did not have enough translators, money, adequate housing, transport, and even clear objectives for their work. They waited for months for the guidance from their superiors in Beijing. The uncertainty and hardships were psychologically hard, and everyday personal problems made it much worse.

In short, Soviet advisers found themselves in a foreign country with a different culture and language, far away from their families and home places. Every day they faced rejection, neglect, or open hostility. Sometimes their plans failed even before they started their task. It is no wonder that Soviet officers were reporting about decay of morale in advisers' groups, asking themselves if they were revolutionaries who were helping to liberate China or were merely mercenaries serving warlords for money. The internal problems in the mission, advisers' inability to establish personal relations with their Chinese partners, personal difficulties in different cultural surroundings, and a lack of knowledge about China all combined to make advisers' efforts fruitless. Compared with the achievements of the Soviet advisers in Guangzhou, the Kalgan group achieved almost nothing before all Soviet missions had to leave China. Though political factors largely determined the success or failure of the Soviet policy in China, the

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<sup>244</sup> Wilbur and How, *Missionaries of revolution*, 79.

internal factors determined the efficiency of the advisers' mission in Feng's army, including their efforts to establish interpersonal communication with their Chinese partners.

## Conclusion

There are several reasons for the failure of the Soviet advisers' mission in Feng Yuxiang's army. First of all, the pragmatic motives for Soviet alliance with Feng did not resolve the long existed political contradictions between Feng and the USSR. Soviet leaders wanted to promote nationalist interests and to establish Soviet political and economic presence in Northern China. Feng Yuxiang was a patriot and anti-imperialist general. Although he used Soviet help to achieve his goal of unifying China, he was strongly against the increase of foreign presence in China. One of the USSR main goals was to spread communism in China, however Feng Yuxiang was not ready to accept the spread of communist ideology in his army. During the whole time of the cooperation between Feng and the USSR, Feng was trying to limit Soviet advisers' educational and political activities in his army, because he did not want to lose absolute control over his troops. Advisers' problems with understanding Chinese culture and political situation in China and in Feng's army, ineffective communication between Soviet and Chinese officers, as well as other internal and interpersonal problems in the advisers' group limited the advisers' ability to achieve success in their mission and eventually contributed to the mission's failure.

After their return from China many of the Soviet advisers made excellent careers and reached high ranks, but it also made them particularly vulnerable as a group when, in 1936, Stalin started his campaign against Soviet military command, also known as the Great Purges. The first head of the Kalgan group of advisers Kazimir Putna, after his mission in China, was sent to Japan as the Soviet military attaché; later he was appointed as a military attaché in Finland, Germany and Great Britain. In 1935 he was promoted to Colonel general. During the Great Purge in 1936 Putna was arrested and then executed in 1937. The second head of the Kalgan group, Vitaly Primakov was sent to Afghanistan in 1929 to work as a military attaché. For his service in Afghanistan he received his third Order of the Red Banner, the highest Soviet military award. In 1930s he made a brilliant career in the army: in 1933 he became deputy of commander of North-Caucasian military district, and in 1934 he was appointed the inspector of

higher education institutions of the Red Army. In January 1935, he became deputy of commander of Leningrad military district. In 1936 Primakov was arrested, and subsequently executed in 1937. Anatoly Gekker, who was military attaché in Beijing in the summer 1925, also perished during the Great Purges. Nothing is known about his successor on the post of the military attaché, Nikolai Voronin, after his return from China. At least forty-nine former Soviet advisers in China died in prisons or were executed, two committed suicide in protest against Stalin's purges and seven survived long periods of internal exile.<sup>245</sup>

However, some military advisers survived and gained distinguished battle records during World War Two. Alexander Blagodatov was a commander during the war and retired as a lieutenant general. His memoirs were published in 1970s. Vera Vishniyakova-Akimova, author of another book of memoirs about Soviet adviser's experience in China, continued her study of China after she returned to the USSR, publishing articles and working as a researcher for the Army General Staff. Her husband, Soviet military adviser Vladimir Akimov, whom she married in China, received an order of the Red Banner for his work in China, fought in World War Two and retired in 1956 as a major general.<sup>246</sup>

After Feng Yuxiang broke his alliance with the USSR, his alliance with Chang Kai-shek did not last long. At the end of 1920s the relations between Chang Kai-shek and Feng Yuxiang deteriorated. In 1929 Feng Yuxiang, in an alliance with other generals opposed Chang Kai-shek and started a rebellion. The war fought in 1930 caused even greater destruction and inflicted higher casualties than any major battle fought during the entire warlord period. In this struggle Feng and his army were defeated. Feng abandoned control of his army and retired; National Peoples' Armies disintegrated and was partially absorbed by the National Revolutionary Army.<sup>247</sup> Feng Yuxiang returned to the political life of China in 1933 when he raised an army to

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<sup>245</sup> Wilbur, and How, *Missionaries of Revolution*, 425.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>247</sup> Larry N. Shyu, "China's National Unity in the 1920's: Feng Yuxiang's Relations with the Kuomintang," *Chinese Studies in History* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 86.

resist Japanese invasion in Manchuria.<sup>248</sup> After his attempts were proven fruitless, he returned to his secluded life on the sacred Taoist mountain Taishan. When in 1937 the war with Japan broke out Feng joined Chang Kai-shek and supported him till the end of the war. In 1946 Feng Yuxiang went to the United States of America, where he gave very hostile speeches against Chang Kai-shek, trying to convince American public that support of Chang Kai-shek was a tragic error. In 1948 he was returning from the United States back to China on the Soviet ship. The fire started on the board of the ship and Feng Yuxiang tragically died. After his death his widow served on high positions in the Communist government of China, and the ashes of Feng were buried with honors on the mount Taishan in 1953.<sup>249</sup>

The group of advisers in Guangzhou of Southern China made significant contributions to unification of China by assisting the KMT in creating a strong National Revolutionary Army and gained considerable influence on its military operations. The northern group of Soviet advisers in Kalgan managed to improve the military training of the National People's Army, the army of Chinese warlord Feng Yuxiang, but it had only limited effects. However, it provided support to the NRA by attacking warlord forces in the Northern China.

As for original Soviet purpose of establishing close relations with Feng Yuxiang and his officers, influencing the organizational and military planning of the army and promoting revolutionary ideology, the Northern group, in contrast with the Southern group, failed to achieve any significant results. Though positions of the Soviet advisers in the National People's Army seemed strong from the beginning and the prospect of their mission once appeared promising, the split between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party in 1927 put an end to Soviet missions in both northern and southern China and nullified all advisers' achievements.<sup>250</sup> After Feng Yuxiang supported Chang Kai-shek and broke off relations with the USSR, the Northern group of advisers had to stop their work and returned to Moscow. Thus, both groups of

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<sup>248</sup> Bonavia, *China's Warlords*, 115.

<sup>249</sup> Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* 280-82.

<sup>250</sup> James E. Sheridan, *Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, 228.



advisers failed to accomplish their main goals: promoting Soviet nationalist and ideological interest through their influence on Chinese revolutionary and national liberation movements.

Even though Moscow's plans to make Feng its ally and to secure its national interests in the Northern China with his help failed, in a long-term investment in Feng's army was beneficial for the USSR. With Soviet help Feng provided significant support to the NRA during the Northern Expedition, which led to creation of unified national government in China in 1927-1945, which became the decisive factor in China's persistent resistance to the Japanese aggression. Because of the Soviet assistance, Feng managed to secure his position as a military and political leader of China, and eventually to become one of the leaders of the anti-Japanese resistance. China's anti-Japanese struggle contributed to the security of the eastern borders of the USSR. Experience of cooperation between the USSR and China in 1920s was later used by both sides to promote mutual cooperation and understanding when both countries became allies during the Second World War.

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