

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN CHINA FOR WESTERNERS

INTRODUCTION

The question of nations in the People's Republic of China (PRC) is critical in understanding the country's internal social and political development. Whereas the question of external development – that is, of various states acting upon China, and so driving China to certain decisions – is one matter, the question of the way in which the nations of the People's Republic interact with one another, and interact with the state, is another subject of study altogether.

Inside the country, the Communist Party of China (CPC), and the Chinese peoples in general, have most likely already produced their own literature and analyses on the matter. They likely have a better understanding of the question than someone from outside of the country, so this brief overview will probably not be of much use to a Chinese citizen. However, we will not sell ourselves short; perhaps it will be useful for a Chinese citizen to apply the Leninist method to the national question in their country.

Either way, it remains undeniable that outside of the country, and especially in English, adequate information on the matter is sparse. One must find ‘needles’ of truth in ‘haystacks’ of slanders, which arise out of either poor research or malicious intent. Scouring for truths in this fashion, one runs the risk of ‘nicking’ their hand on ‘needles’ of misinformation, so we should attempt to arrange everything neatly for the reader, cleansed of disinformation and red herrings.

However, since we occupy the position of the foreigner, our investigation will have to remain rather limited in scope.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. (Stalin, 1913)

We must understand nations not as the land, the soil, first and foremost – this is the bourgeois conception of nations. For us, nations are first and foremost a social relation. Thus, the foremost characteristic of the nation is not the land, but the *language*, the physical means by which people think and socialize.

A common language is the first and foremost characteristic of nations. Without a language, there is no nation; if two people speak two different languages, then they belong to two different nations.

Common land is secondary to this. But that does not mean it is irrelevant: if a people exist with a language, but disunited from one another, without a common land, then their nation is in the process of assimilation, of fading into history.

The other characteristics are tertiary, arising out of the previous two characteristics. We will not examine these characteristics in detail, but they are good to keep in mind.

CHINA

The entity which we call “China” is not a single nation; it possesses many peoples, who speak many languages. There are about 297 known languages which exist in China today (Sawe, 2020), and thus, China is a conglomeration of *at least* 297 nations.

Among these, some of the largest languages are Mandarin, Cantonese, Wu (Shanghainese), Xiang, Gan, Minnan (Taiwanese), Minbei, Tibetan, Uyghur, Krygyz, Hakka, Zhuang, and Mongolian. However, these languages themselves are divided into subgroups, some of which are unintelligible to one another. This greatly complicates the matter, but we will begin to decipher that in a moment.

If the thing we call “China” is not a single nation, then what is it?

China is a historically-borne conglomeration of peoples, of nations, who, at this or that period of time, found themselves united under a common political entity we refer to as “China”. The first of these political entities, these polities, that is proven to have existed is the Yin state, also called the Shang. The ruins of long-dead Yin cities produce artifacts which bear the oldest known examples of the Old Chinese language, the basis of the modern Chinese languages.

THE QIN AND ZHONGGUO

Eventually, the Yin fell to time, and the Old Chinese speaking people were no longer united under a single state; there emerged multiple polities which spoke the Old Chinese language. These polities were opposed to one another throughout the Warring States Period, a two-hundred year long era of persistent conflict and civil war. Eventually, in the 200s BC, these warring peoples were united under a single state by the King Zheng of the Qin dynasty (pronounced ‘chine’, hence, ‘China’). King Zheng proclaimed himself “Qin Shi Haungdi”, “The First Emperor of Qin”. According to tradition, he called the capital of his territory “Zhongguo”, or “the Central State”. This was the first iteration of the Chinese Empire.

Under Qin’s rule, the language which had developed during the era of the Yin dynasty was given a formalized writing system, and spread to the lands brought under the state. After Qin died, the polity did as well. However, the ghost of the Chinese Empire would live on, and many throughout history would bring this ghost back to life; the title Qin had given himself – Emperor, *Huángdì* – would be reused by some 89 dynasties for the next two thousand years.

THE CHINESE EMPIRE AND THE HAN

The Chinese Empire must not be conceived of as a single eternal thing, which was created in the 200s BC and lived until the 1900s. Rather, the Chinese Empire is the constantly recurring political union of various peoples, whose borders changed upon the victories or defeats of this or that Emperor or conqueror. Stalin, the first specialist on the national question, described a similar thing occurring with the Persian Empire of Cyrus, and the Macedonian Empire of Alexander:

...It is unquestionable that the great empires of Cyrus and Alexander could not be called nations, although they came to be constituted historically and were formed out of different tribes and races. They were not nations, but casual and loosely-connected conglomerations of groups, which fell apart or joined together according to the victories or defeats of this or that conqueror. (Stalin, 1913)

After the Qin had fallen in the 200s BC, there was a brief period of civil war, until there was again a reunification of the old Qin lands under a minor prince, Liu Bang, who previously ruled a settlement near the Han River. After Liu united the warring Chinese peoples, he proclaimed himself Emperor of the Han polity; he was posthumously re-named Gaozu of Han, or “the Founder of Han”.

This polity lasted from 200 BC to 200 AD, outliving the original Qin by four hundred years; at its furthest extent, it reached to the Tarim Basin. The influence of the Han in spreading the Old Chinese language and culture across vast swathes of Asia left an un-erasable mark on history.

From the point of the Han’s collapse and onwards is the recurring process of disintegrations, reformations, and so forth of the Chinese Empire. Within each of these unions, there were not only subjects who spoke Old Chinese or descendants of it; there were often Mongolians, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Koreans, and so on. In some cases, not only were there non-Chinese subjects to these states, but the official language of the ruling dynasty itself was not Chinese. Ironically, the largest iteration of the Chinese Empire would occur during the 13th century reign of Kublai Khan, the Mongolian conqueror and grandson of Genghis Khan, who ruled as Emperor of the Yuan dynasty over the subjugated Chinese peoples.

OLD CHINESE AND MANDARIN

As already stated, the oldest physical records of the Old Chinese language being used dates to the Yin dynasty; hence why the Yin are considered the oldest of the Chinese peoples. The Qin descended directly from the Yin, and thus, the official language of the Qin polity was Old Chinese. The Han then descended from the Qin, and so their language was also Old Chinese; they imparted this language on anyone they conquered, but the assimilation of languages takes many generations, especially during ancient times. Thus, it's more right to say there were “fragments” of the Chinese language and culture left across the various non-Chinese peoples

during periods of Chinese rule; during these periods, state officials, bureaucrats, and so on usually spoke the Chinese language.

In this way, the Old Chinese language was the *lingua franca* of the Chinese Empire.

The thing we call Old Chinese has long since diverged into multiple languages, and those languages themselves are even further divided into more languages. The largest of these is considered Mandarin, but Mandarin is itself not one language: it is divided into Hebei (the closest descendant to Old Chinese), Zhongyuan (the largest descendant of Old Chinese), Sichuanese, Shandong, Hakka, and so forth.

Thus, there is not one Chinese nation: it is really many nations united under a common political entity at various points in history, primarily around the political leadership of the various Hans. The Han people, those that speak a descendant of the Old Chinese language, began as a *race*, a group of nations with a common linguistic ancestor – that ancestor being Old Chinese.

Today, the Han people have mostly become a single nation, speaking dialects of Standardized Mandarin.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE KUOMINTANG

The Chinese Empire, as we have seen, was not a single nation, but a recurrently rising and falling unification of the various states that descend from the Old Chinese people. In its various reincarnations, the Chinese Empire lasted from about 1200 BC to 1912 AD.

The final iteration of the Chinese Empire was called the Qing, which was founded by Emperor Hong Taiji in 1636. This iteration was led not by Hans, but by Manchus.

The Manchu-led Qing Empire would lose a series of debilitating wars with the Western powers, Russia, and Japan, culminating in the “century of humiliation”; from the 19th to the 20th century, China lived in a thousand pieces, occupied at various corners by the powers of Europe, suffering crises of opium trading, bankruptcy, poverty, famine, anti-Western insurrection (such as the Boxer Rebellion), and so forth.

The Qing was dealt its killing blow not by the Western conquerors, but by the various Han nationalities. At the beginning of the 20th century came the rise of the Chinese nationalist movement; after the Emperor Guangxu died in 1908, a two-year old was appointed to the throne of the downtrodden Chinese peoples, and these peoples refused to recognize not only the ascended heir, but the throne in general. A series of revolts broke out, and in 1912, the Prime Minister of the Qing, Yuan Shikai, effectively performed a coup ousting the Emperor and his regent, the Empress Dowager Longyu. Shortly afterwards, Longyu proclaimed the throne vacant and abdicated, officially bringing the Chinese Empire to its grave.

In the aftermath of the coup, there was no China: the 2000 year old recurring political entity was again smashed into several warring tribes like before. But this was the early 20th century: it was the era of fervent nationalism. The Han peoples were not about to allow their state crumble at the hands of Manchus.

In the wreckage of the old Empire, there stood a political entity amidst Nanjing which proclaimed itself the Republic of China (RoC). This political entity was led by a Hakka-Han, Sun Yat-sen, who declared his goal the reunification of not only the Han peoples, but the whole former territory of the Qing:

...After the overthrow of the Qing... we speak of unifying the 'five nationalities' (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan), yet surely our country has far more than five nationalities? My stand is that we should unite all the peoples of China into one Chinese nation. (Sun Yat-sen, 1920)

Sun Yat-sen called this ideology *Zhonghua Minzu*, or “Chinese nation[alism]”. In 1919, he founded the Kuomintang (KMT) with the goal of unifying the warring Chinese states under the RoC and advancing the ideal of *Zhonghua Minzu*.

At this point in time, the young revolutionary Mao Zedong was likely a member, or at least very close to members, of the KMT. That year, he wrote in an article titled *To the Glory of the Hans*:

We must act energetically to carry out the great union of the popular masses, which will not brook a moment's delay... our Chinese people possesses great intrinsic energy. The more profound the oppression, the greater its resistance; that which has accumulated for a long time will surely burst forth quickly. The great union of the Chinese people must be achieved Gentlemen! (Mao Zedong, 1919)

Today, the KMT and the Republic of China still exist, but only on the island of Taiwan; we will see why momentarily. The KMT continued to maintain their claim on China for some time; beyond the current Chinese borders, they also claimed the entirety of Mongolia, parts of Russia, Bhutan, Burma, and more. Today, they refrain from doing this openly.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

In 1921, Mao reserved criticisms of Sun Yat-sen's refusal to mobilize the peasantry and industrial workers against the feudal warlords. He and others formed the Communist Party of China (CPC), which remained a faction connected with the KMT. Later reiterating the CPC's support for Chinese nationalism, Mao declared:

...All Communists and sympathizers with communism in China must struggle to achieve... a China of the revolutionary Three People's Principles of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a China which is independent, free, democratic, united, prosperous and powerful. (Mao Zedong, 1945)

The CPC thus had two goals:

Its *primary* goal was that of Chinese nationalism, the creation of a Chinese nation out of the various warring peoples of Asia. This nation was not only Han, but, as Sun Yat-sen explained, Manchu, Mongolian, and so forth; however, the Han would serve as the integral unit, the form which the others were to assimilate into.

The *secondary* goal was that of socialism, of a peasants and workers revolution.

Why do we say our revolution in the present period is bourgeois-democratic in nature? We mean that the target of this revolution is not the bourgeoisie in general but national and feudal oppression, that the measures taken in this revolution are in general directed not at abolishing but at protecting private property, and that as a result of this revolution the working class will be able to build up the strength to lead China in the direction of socialism, though capitalism will still be enabled to grow to an appropriate extent for a fairly long period. (*Mao, Ibid*)

In 1925 Sun Yat-sen died, and he was replaced in the KMT by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek). Jiang led the “Northern Expedition”, a military effort that saw the Republic of China at last unify the various Chinese peoples under a single Republic. Immediately afterwards, in 1927, Jiang unleashed a massacre upon the CPC and any city-goers suspected of affiliating with them. The massacre broke the KMT-CPC alliance, the Republic began to falter, and the two became embroiled in a bloody civil war that lasted for nearly 20 years.

Elaborating on the nature of the struggle, Mao declared that it was the CPC, and not the KMT, which was the adequate successor of Sun Yat-sen and the *Zhonghua Minzu* legacy:

From 1927 to 1936, the Chinese Communist Party adopted various measures for the thorough reform of the land system and put Dr. Sun's "land to the tiller" into effect. It was precisely the reactionary clique of the Kuomintang, that gang of unworthy followers of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who bared their teeth, showed their claws and fought against "land to the tiller" in ten years of war against the people... (*Ibid*)

Commenting on *Zhonghua Minzu* and Chinese nationalism itself, Mao stated:

The Communist Party of China is in full agreement with Dr. Sun [Yat-sen]'s policy on nationalities... (*Ibid*)

In 1949, the KMT was outmaneuvered and fled *en masse* to the island of Taiwan, where they set up a government-in-exile. The triumphant CPC established the People's Republic of China, and the various Chinese nationalities were united under a single state.

The goal of creating a single Chinese nation out of many nations is still adhered to today, in the form of the *Chinese Dream*, a philosophy coined by the current President Xi Jinping. Xi stated in his *Governance of China*:

For Chinese people both at home and abroad, a united Chinese nation is our shared root, the profound Chinese culture is our shared soul, and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is our shared dream. The shared root fosters eternal brotherhood, the shared soul links our hearts, and the shared dream holds us all together – we will go on to write a new chapter in the history of the Chinese nation. (Xi Jinping, 2014)

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE ‘FOUR OLDS’

One of the more infamous moments of the PRC’s history came in the mid-1960s, when Mao launched the ‘Cultural Revolution’. This saga is well-known about in the Western world. However both adherents and opponents to the decisions made by Mao and the CPC during this period focus on the actual actions, the Cultural Revolution itself, ignoring what the Cultural Revolution was a result of, and intended to do. In common discourse, the period has been abstracted into the romanticized idea of mob violence, struggle sessions, book burnings, and so on.

What was the *essence* of the Cultural Revolution?

At its core, the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to speedily assimilate the various Chinese nationalities into a single people, with a single culture (which was communistic and necessarily atheistic), language, economic life (which heavily relied on communal kitchens, farms, etc.), and so on.

We will not go into specific details about the various stages of the Cultural Revolution, nor will we appraise it as a social movement. But we should investigate the campaign against the ‘Four Olds’ that took place in this period.

The ‘Four Olds’ campaign was launched in 1966, and targeted the “old ideas, old customs, old culture, and old habits” of all the Chinese peoples. *Peking Review*, the national magazine of the CPC, reported:

The young Red Guards of Peking, detachments of students, have taken to the streets... They have launched a furious offensive to sweep away reactionary, decadent bourgeois and feudal influences, and all old ideas, culture, customs and habits. This mounting revolutionary storm is sweeping the cities of the entire nation. (*Peking Review*, 1966)

The ensuing national strife that arose out of this attempted integration grew to be so violent that the CPC ceased the Cultural Revolution; Mao’s successor Deng Xiaoping would later argue that the Cultural Revolution at some points grew so fierce, it constituted “a civil war”. (Deng Xiaoping, 1992)

THE ROOT OF NATIONAL UNREST

The root of national unrest in China lies in the lack of each nation's right to secede from the People's Republic. When the Republic was established, the CPC abandoned the clause on right to national secession which had been part of their platform since 1931, modeled after the Soviet Union's clause of similar principle.

The 1931 constitution of the Communist Party's controlled areas read:

The [Socialist] government of China recognizes the right of self-determination of the national minorities in China, their right to complete separation from China, and to the formation of an independent state for each national minority. (The Communist Party of China, 1931)

The corresponding clause in the 1949 constitution of the People's Republic of China read:

All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity, and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.¹ (The Communist Party of China, 1949)

This is a stark difference: this removal of the right of nations to refuse assimilation into the Han would serve to be the “nucleus” of all the national struggles in China. The clause in the 1949 constitution is still used today. (NP Congress of the PRC, 2004)

The People's Republic requires the development of each nation in order to successfully assimilate it into the idealized Han nationality; but this development also requires the industrialization, etc. of each nation, and in this process, these peoples will see their ability to engage in free and unfettered trade stifled by the restrictions of the socialist state.

The cultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics of the various Chinese nations arise out of their economic conditions and structures. On a formal level, the Chinese state promotes and defends the various national cultures, languages, and religions; but in essence, the role of the People's Republic is to integrate each nation economically, and the integration of national cultures, languages, and religions is an inevitable consequence of this.

Without the national right to secede, these nations are forced to endure the integration process even if it ceases to benefit them materially or ideologically, leading to national strife. The only way to quell this strife is through economic concessions or military force, which are only temporary measures.

¹ Under the 1949 (and current) clause, Stalin and Lenin would be “prohibited” if they were Chinese! This does a good job of portraying the way in which not all socialist states may be painted with one brush.

This strife takes a particularly dire character when the nation being assimilated is of a non-Han character, a non-Han race. In such instances, the attention of the whole world is piqued, and one starts to see cynic journalists begin to stir panic about the “Han menace”, and so forth.

It would be wearisome to go through each and every Chinese nation and its relation to the state. It is mostly important to understand that there are in particular two types of national struggles that arise out of two economic conditions:

Non-Han national struggles, which mostly occur in predominantly rural regions such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. These struggles arise out of linguistic and cultural assimilation, especially in matters of religion. They are exacerbated by economic conditions, firstly by land reform, and then by industrialization.

In these regions, the PRC may placate the separatist sentiment through economic maneuvering; but, as the regions involve enter into the advanced stages of industrialization, they will likely feel progressively stifled by the state, and the masses will probably perceive the state as being detrimental to their economic condition; in this case, separatist sentiment will rise.

And then there are Han national struggles, which occur in predominantly urban regions such as Hong Kong or Taiwan. These struggles arise out of economic conditions foremost, and are exacerbated by cultural and historical differences. Typically, they are born out of conditions wherein a non-PRC power ruled over the region for some time before coming under the PRC’s control, while still maintaining their old economic structure. For instance: the United Kingdom ruled Hong Kong for over a century, and the city still has a Western-style service economy and liberal democracy; attempts at economic or political reform tend to evoke outrage and mass protests. In Taiwan, the Republic of China still lives on under the wing of the United States, and the PRC has granted it the concession of “one country, two systems”. Still, the PRC’s refusal to recognize the sovereignty of Taiwan as an independent country has made their intentions clear; it is therefore often speculated that Taiwan will be a prospective “catalyst” to a conflict between the United States and the People’s Republic.

THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT

Regarding the Leninist position on the national right to secession, Stalin said:

It scarcely needs proof that the Russian workers would not have gained the sympathy of their comrades of other nationalities if, having assumed power, they had not proclaimed the right of nations to secede, if they had not demonstrated in practice their readiness to give effect to this inalienable right of nations, if they had not renounced their "rights," let us say, to Finland, if they had not withdrawn their troops from North Persia, if they had not renounced all claims to certain parts of Mongolia, China, etc., etc.

And he was right: when the People's Republic denied this same right in return, they did not gain the sympathy of their “comrades of other nationalities”. The Soviet Union and People's Republic would carry out a series of border disputes and conflicts throughout the late 1950s and 60s. These border conflicts were reflected in the lens of an ideological split between the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, and Mao Zedong, who was still leading the PRC at the time.

It is often believed that the split occurred because Khrushchev opposed Stalin, while Mao upheld him; in a formal sense, this is true. Khrushchev denounced Stalin and those who followed him, while Mao denounced this denunciation. However, these were ideological reflections of the material conflict between the two states. Ironically, it was Khrushchev who led the state which adhered to the Stalinist principle on the national question, and it was Mao who led the state which strictly prohibited this principle in its constitution.

The two states never fully mended the split. By 1972, Mao was shaking hands with Nixon, and the USSR was in decline.

BORDER DISPUTES WITH OTHER STATES

The border disputes between the People's Republic and other nations are also a frequent topic of discussion. Among these, the three main countries that have come into conflict (and still do come into conflict) with China are the Philippines, India, and Vietnam, though there are others.

The conflicts between China and the Philippines and Vietnam are primarily wrought by Chinese industrial expansion into the Western Sea, which frequently leads to scuffles between Chinese industrial vessels and foreign fishing boats. On top of this, historical grudges persist on a popular level, but state relations remain mostly professional, especially in the modern era.

As for India, things are different. The Indians and Chinese have overlapping claims on lands in the Arunachal Pradesh and Depsang Plains, arising out of the somewhat unresolved situation at the end of the Sino-Indian War in 1962. Technically, there are no official borders; the two countries have been engaging in unarmed skirmishes for outposts, sometimes with primitive weapons (such as clubs, polearms, knives, and so on), since the end of the war. In 1979, a gun was discharged; it wasn't until 2020 that another such incident occurred, though it is disputed which side fired the shots.

If India were not so militarily and administratively weak compared to China, war would be a fair assumption. But, realistically, war under present conditions could possibly lead to the disintegration of the Indian state, which is preoccupied with economic development; since China also has no ambitions to begin a war, the situation will likely remain a matter of border skirmishes unless worsened by outside influence.

“CHINA COLLAPSE” THEORIES

The question of so-called “China collapse” theories is two-fold. First, we must understand the theories and their origin. Second, we must understand the question itself – *will the People’s Republic of China collapse?*

At its essence, the “China collapse” theory insinuates that the People’s Republic is a temporary and unsustainable aberration in Chinese history. It insists that the various nationalities under the People’s Republic will grow restless, that eventually this unrest will grow to a certain point that the Communist Party can no longer sustain it, and the state will collapse, resulting in various successor states based on national lines².

A typical assertion which comes attached to this theory is that the Kuomintang-led Republic of China will return to the mainland and oust the CPC, reclaiming its former territory (or at least the territory of the Han nationalities). This assertion has existed since the KMT was cornered in Taiwan and refused to give up its territorial claims. As late as 1956, Jiang Jieshi rather optimistically wrote:

“As long as I am not hindered by external forces, I can now counterattack the mainland and destroy the Communist regime.” (Chen Bui, 1978)

This did not happen. Still, certain souls in the west, particularly among the Chinese diaspora, remain just as optimistic.

This theory was implicitly supported by the United States as well, who, against the majority of the world, maintained a stance against recognizing the legitimacy of the People’s Republic over the Republic of China as late as 1971.

This theory has persisted, being peddled especially by Western media such as *New York Times*; in 2001, the theory was given particular prominence with the publishing of *The Coming Collapse of China* by Gordon G. Chang (a man we won’t go into here). The work “proved” the collapse of China was a definitive truth that would come as a result of the CPC’s economic measures.

New York Times offered a review:

As Chang discovered, China is a nation of contradictions. Many of its state industries are virtually bankrupt; its banking system sits on a mountain of unrecognized bad debts; its agriculture is primitive; pollution is out of control; and government interference and corruption are killing off a number of new business ventures.

² In many conceptions of the theory, the “nations” in question are very arbitrarily conceived

Bloomberg Businessweek, a publication by no means friendly towards the CPC, but perhaps more suited to the task of reviewing a work on economics, disagreed:

In *The Coming Collapse of China*, Gordon G. Chang launches directly into his controversial argument that the country's many woes add up to a terminal illness... Chang, an American lawyer with almost two decades of experience working on the mainland, takes his startling polemic one step further: He says that... the Communist Party will soon collapse--possibly within 5 years--and the country will face enormous upheaval. That's a dubious proposition. (Roberts, 2013)

Ultimately, Chang's prediction was undercut by the fact that he gave a specific year – 2011 – for the collapse of the People's Republic to take place. In 2011, when the People's Republic had not collapsed, he was forced to correct his date, instead saying:

Not long ago, everything was going well for the mandarins in Beijing. Now, nothing is. So, yes, my prediction was wrong. Instead of 2011, the mighty Communist Party of China will fall in 2012. Bet on it.

This also did not happen. Still, Chang's influence persists: he has given interviews on nearly every major news station in the US, and his writings can be found quoted in such journals as *National Review*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and so forth. Chang himself can be found speaking on nearly any major news station in the US, or at any major university. His theoretical collapse of China, too, can be found giddily repeated by Western journalists, professors, and so on.

WILL CHINA COLLAPSE?

The question of China's collapse as frequently peddled in the West – that “there are conflicts within the Party”, that “the President’s cult of personality is being undermined”, that “the banks risk faltering”, and so on – teeter between wishful thinking and narrow-mindedness. Even if these things were true, the outcome of a financial collapse, factional split, etc. would be determined by the underlying national question in China.

We saw previously how the right to national secession was removed between the 1931 and 1949 constitutions of the CPC and PRC. If the nations of China do not have the right to secede, they may not refrain from this process of linguistic, cultural, economic, etc. assimilation; *even if they wish to go along with these processes*, it is not their state getting to decide if they are subjected to these processes.

Elaborating on these processes, Stalin said:

The chief problem for the young bourgeoisie is the problem of the market. Its aim is to sell its goods and to emerge victorious from competition with the bourgeoisie of a different nationality. Hence its desire to secure its "own," its "home" market... But matters are usually not confined to the market... The dominant nation is able to deal "swiftly" and "decisively" with its competitor...

[if] a series of restrictive measures is put into operation against the "alien" bourgeoisie... Restriction of freedom of movement, repression of language, restriction of franchise, closing of schools, religious restrictions, and so on, are piled upon the head of the "competitor."

Whether or not the Chinese state *intends* to act repressively is irrelevant: to the landowning classes, whether urban or rural, of the nations involved, these acts will appear as repressions, *especially as the nation in question industrializes.*

This means that over time, and in proportion to the level of force used in assimilation, unrest will grow. The more unrest grows, the further it will have to be suppressed; the further it is suppressed, the worse it will grow. Elaborating on this unrest, Stalin said:

The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, repressed on every hand, is naturally stirred into movement. It appeals to its "native folk" and begins to shout about the "fatherland,'; claiming that its own cause is the cause of the nation as a whole. It recruits itself an army from among its "countrymen" in the interests of the "fatherland."

However, this movement at first is bound to appear weak. It only becomes strong if the "wide strata of the country... participate in it".

What determines if the "wide strata of the country" conform or resist to the process of assimilation? Primarily economic factors:

Whether the proletariat rallies to the banner of bourgeois nationalism depends on the degree of development of class antagonisms, on the class consciousness and degree of organization of the proletariat. The class-conscious proletariat has its own tried banner, and has no need to rally to the banner of the bourgeoisie.

Hence why those who most conform to the process of assimilation into the Han ideal are those in the urban regions of the nations involved; it is in these cities that the Communist Party's influence permeates the most, and the industrial workers forsake national struggle for class struggle. Still, in places where the CPC has limited reach – such as Hong Kong or Taiwan – the urban masses prove to be stubbornly resistant to integration and stays firmly on the side of their own bourgeoisies, their own capitalist classes.

Stalin further said:

As far as the peasants are concerned, their participation in the national movement depends primarily on the character of the repressions. If the repressions affect the "land," as was the case in Ireland, then the mass of the peasants immediately rally to the banner of the national movement.

Hence the especial prominence of the nationalist movements in Tibet, Xinjiang, and so on. In these regions, the CPC's reach exists mainly in the form of party deputies who must travel to the most remote villages and establish contact with the native villagers there. Even the poorest rural

farmers will feel suppressed should the state begin to tell them how to manage their land, and especially, their religion. Hence, the CPC has not focused on taking measures against these aspects. Instead, they have launched a large-scale poverty alleviation campaign to raise the discordant rural masses into industrialized urban economies.

After this is complete, it is likely that there will be an especially intense phase of nationalism among these regions, for here, the “the degree of development of class antagonisms” will still be particularly low; however, class consciousness and organization should exist, and so it remains to be seen if such a phase will be tenable by the CPC. After this phase, there will be the period of assimilation into the Han, assuming the nations involved remain a part of the PRC.

Now we can address the question, *will the People's Republic of China collapse?*

We have already discussed how some believe the answer is in the affirmative. Still, the overwhelming sentiment – particularly within China itself – is that China cannot possibly collapse because, in spite of everything, it has only grown stronger. The current President of China, Xi Jinping, echoes this sentiment:

There has been no end to the different flavors of “China collapse” theory. Yet China has not collapsed. To the contrary, our comprehensive national strength increases day by day. The living standards of the people are constantly improving. (Xi Jinping, 2019)

This is true: in spite of all the panic-mongering by Western intellectuals, and despite the two specific dates given by Gordon Chang, China has not collapsed. On the contrary, it has grown stronger: the unrest in Tibet has greatly calmed down; there exists little problems today between the Hans and the Mongolians; Islamic radicalization and Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang has been *very* effectively combated; the US-backed Hong Kong movement, which rallied a fair portion of the city’s inhabitants, was put down without much bloodshed; and Taiwan seems to be all-but abandoned by the ‘world-police’.

However, we must consider things dialectically; multinational states are a temporary phenomenon. There must be an external motivation to the existence of a multinational state, or the state begins to internally conflict with itself, to disunify and fall into civil strife, even civil war. When we speak of “external motivation”, we talk of foreign invasion, conquest, neighboring warlords, etc.

The “golden age” of a multinational state is inversely the lowest point of its nations; it is when external factors most threaten the nations involved, and so they have given themselves to the process of assimilation. It stands to reason, then, that the “golden age” of the nations is inversely the lowest point of the multinational state; it is when external force least threatens the nations, and they are able to function independently, without integrating into a single body.

How does this all apply to the People's Republic of China?

Internally, the nations of the Chinese state contradict one another; they are different nationalities with different languages, religions, etc., and thus the only way for them to assimilate into the Han is for the Han to act upon them directly, antagonistically. The outcome of this should be obvious.

However, *externally*, the nations of the Chinese state are united to one another in contradiction to outside forces, primarily Western states such as Germany, the UK, and the US. This external pressure provides the motive force for assimilation into the Han without the Han needing to act antagonistically towards the nations involved; they may offer them the benefit of an advanced economy which, as a presupposition, requires the use of Mandarin to adequately participate in.

The contradiction presents itself: in order to integrate into a single “Chinese nation”, the Chinese peoples must be suffering. If they are suffering, the process of national assimilation will rapidly take place, but the development of the economy will falter, and the country will be unable to withstand pressure from outside forces. If it begins faltering against outside forces, then the nations will have no reason to belong to the People’s Republic, and will attempt to secede.

In order to prevent the People’s Republic from faltering under pressure, it must be constantly developing economically, politically, and militarily; in order to do this, it must develop *all* nations involved (as they are doing with the poverty alleviation programs and so on). Yet, China is beginning to *surpass* the other large world power – the United States. As it begins to eclipse outside forces, the external motivation for the unity of the Chinese nations dissolves; the People’s Republic starts to become a formality. Without the right to secession, the state’s attempts to maintain the assimilation into a single Chinese nation will begin to falter, and the state will be driven into contradiction with the masses. Throughout all of this, one should not assume that a weak US is a dead US – the US, along with various other nations, would probably use economic power to further intensify the antagonisms between the Chinese state and peoples, and the situation could become untenable.

One must remember, when the Western countries, at the behest of the US, utilized this method on the Soviet Union – a country that had thoroughly solved the national question, offered secession to its republics, and so forth – the state violently collapsed and were plunged into economic backwardness. It was not when the Americans applied the *omst* pressure – troops and embargos – but when they applied the least pressure – economic offers, business opportunities – that the USSR faltered worse.

China is a country which has *not* solved the national question, and which does not grant the right to secede.

Lenin said:

Socialist Parties which fail to prove... that they will free the enslaved nations and establish relations with them on the basis of a free union – *and a free union is a lying phrase without right to secession* – such parties would be committing treachery to socialism. (Lenin, 1916)

And he said this for a reason. Without the right to secession, *the state will appear as an oppressor nation, even if it is bringing the fullest liberation to a nation's people.* One must not forget how many of the Tibetan serfs who were freed by the PLA used this newfound freedom to reaffirm their fealty to the Dalai Lama.

One cannot answer “yes” or “no” to the question, *will China collapse?* This is a matter for history to answer. What we should say is that the threat is *definitely* present, and that this threat could grow dire if the Leninist analysis and method is not applied to the question.

Still, as long as the Chinese peoples are threatened by outside forces in a flagrant manner, they will remain bound to one another by necessity – the most dangerous thing for China would be a United States that grants them everything they ask for.

J. VOLKER

WORKS CITED

- Chen Bui.** 1978. Chronology of Mr. Chiang Kai-shek. 1978.
- Deng Xiaoping.** 1992. Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang. 1992.
- Jiang Jieshi.** 1959. Letter to Compatriots in Tibet. 1959.
- Lenin, Vladimir.** 1916. The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination. 1916.
- Mao Zedong.** 1945. On Coalition Government. 1945.
- . 1919. To The Glory of the Hans. 1919.
- NP Congress of the PRC.** 2004. Constitution of the People's Republic of China. 2004.
- Peking Review.** 1966. Red Guards Destroy the Old and Establish the New. 1966.
- Roberts, Dexter.** 2013. Pessimism on a Grand Scale. *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 2013.
- Sawe, Benjamin Elisha.** 2020. What Languages Are Spoken In China? *World Atlas*. 2020.
- Stalin.** 1913. Marxism and the National Question. 1913.
- Sun Yat-sen.** 1920. Explanation of the revision of the party constitution-a speech at the headquarter meeting of the Chinese Kuomintang in Shanghai. 1920.
- The Communist Party of China.** 1931. The Constitution of the Communist Party of China. 1931.
- . 1949. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China. 1949.
- Xi Jinping.** 2014. Governance of China. 2014.
- . 2019. Several Issues Concerning Upholding and Developing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. 2019.