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**From the Treaty Port to the
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From the Treaty Port to the Village: Intellectuals and Peasants in the Chinese Communist Revolution

Historians and journalists traced Chinese civilization back five millennia, while the more reticent scholars identified the Republican Revolution of 1911 as the origin of the Chinese nation-state. However, a unified, relatively stable nation-state known as China did not exist until 1949. Given the chaos caused by factions of warlords and foreign imperialism, a modern state could only emerge after a surge of nationalism among China's hundreds of millions of peasants. Beginning in the 1950s, Western academics inaugurated a sharply divided debate as to the root causes of the Communist's successful mobilization of the peasant population.

Japan-area scholar Chalmers Johnson argued that the CCP effectively channeled the spontaneous arrival of national consciousness among the peasantry. Johnson employed a functional definition of nationalism, in which the physical impact of particular political contexts produces nationalist movements.¹ In this case, the Japanese invading army's destruction of the countryside provoked the peasants into national consciousness and resistance, to the benefit of the Communists. China specialist Mark Selden was more sympathetic to the claims of Mao Zedong and the CCP itself, bolstered by his research of peasant conditions on a crucial guerilla base. His landmark research on the Yan'an period, in which Mao's embattled CCP implemented "New Democracy," allowed him to weave a narrative of increasing economic exploitation and popular desperation leading to an effective political response by Communist forces. For years

¹ Johnson, Chalmers A. *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), ix.

after Selden's base area study, China scholars adopted his method by confining their research to local conditions.

The Nationalist and Communist parties were not the only mass-based political movements at the time. Still, they both sought to invigorate a desperate and disparate peasantry both to unify the nation and then to expel the brutal Japanese invasion after 1937. I argue first that there were real differences between these movements. While both the Nationalists and Communists professed political commitment to the peasants, the form and expression of that platform varied dramatically. At the opposite extreme, the CCP avoided enacting the harsh tax policies and forcible conscription of the Nationalist Party. Ultimately, I argue that the CCP was best equipped to construct China because of theoretical flexibility that accommodated economic grievances and nationalist sentiments, as well as historical contingency.

It is impossible to understand the Nationalist Party and the CCP's relation to the peasantry without first understanding their relation to each other. Early Nationalist leader Sun Yat-Sen failed to garner support from Western capitalist countries for his Party, so he turned to the Soviet Union for aid. In 1923 the Guomindang (GMD) was reorganized with a Leninist hierarchical party structure. Even more significant, the relatively minuscule Chinese Communist Party joined with the Nationalists to form the First United Front.² The CCP constituted a "bloc within" the GMD. Soviet advisors from the Comintern, an organization that sought to internationalize revolution, reasoned that a bourgeois nationalist revolution must precede a socialist revolution led by the urban proletariat. The CCP, in fact, benefitted from phenomenal

² Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 282; Selden, Mark. *China in Revolution: The Yenan Way Revisited*. Armonk (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 19.

growth during the First United Front, increasing its membership from one to sixty thousand.³

After Sun's untimely death in 1925, General Chiang Kai-Shek emerged as his most likely successor. General Chiang was long considered Sun's favorite despite his conservative attachment to Confucianism and the merchant-gentry class.⁴ Chiang's background as commander of the Whampoa Military Academy assisted his accession to power as a result of the Northern Expedition of 1926-1927, which featured several graduates of the Academy. The Northern Expedition targeted Southern Chinese warlords and British-controlled treaty port cities, seeking to finally unify China. Writing in the Shanghai-based English daily newspaper the North China Daily Herald, the virulently anti-communist American journalist George Sokolsky lauded the popular nationalism of the GMD. "They, the Chinese, fired by a new spirit, striving after an idealistic goal, fraternizing with the masses wherever they came, supported by merchant, labourer and peasant, could not lose."⁵

Chiang's military prowess paid off, and the GMD established its capital in Nanjing, near Shanghai. The GMD would retain power there until 1937, during the so-called "Nanjing Decade." In a crucial decision, Chiang betrayed the left-wing labor unions in Shanghai, and brutally repressed the Communists and mass movements in general. The so-called "White Terror" employed the assistance of the underground mafia group the Green Gang, and marked the permanent end of the First United Front. The resurgent GMD in Nanjing had essentially abrogated its ties with mass movements in the cities as well as in rural China, established earlier by Sun. The tension between town and country constantly informed the dynamic of the Chinese Civil War, which persisted intermittently until 1949.

³ Hayford, Charles. *To The People: James Yen and Village China* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 61.

⁴ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 284.

⁵ Sokolsky, George. *North China Daily Herald*. May 7, 1927.

After the seminal break with the CCP in 1927, most GMD leaders shared a common ideology: “an anti-Communist bent and a strong belief in a one-party system, political centralization, and a high degree of control over the economy.”⁶ The tenets of the Nationalist economic philosophy, discussed below, differed greatly from the party’s original orientation under Sun. Sun’s approach tended toward gradual redistribution of land, although he was careful to avoid the rhetoric of class war. By way of contrast, Chiang ousted many populist figures from within his own party, and summarily liquidated ties to nearly all organizations of popular sentiment – the labor unions, the peasant associations, and the Communist Party. Famed historian of China John King Fairbank described the Nanjing government as “reactionary in its old-style competition with provincial warlords.”⁷

After exiling the Communists to the countryside, urban intellectuals within the Nationalist Party struggled for dominance over party thought. The GMD was split between three major factions: Chiang and the military, political leaders like Chen Gongbo and Wang Jingwei, and the “Left Guomindang.” Chen and Wang repeatedly referenced European fascism as an impressive standard to be imitated. In the face of foreign imperialism, they were attracted by the Italian fascist emphasis on autarky, or economic self-sufficiency. Indeed, Chen Gongbo befriended Italian dictator Benito Mussolini’s son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, who served as the Italian consul in Shanghai in the early 1930s.⁸

The newly formed National Economic Council (NEC) served as the primary outlet for the economic policy pronouncements of Chen and Wang. The NEC proposed not laissez faire but “bureaucratic capitalism,” government control of an increasingly powerful private sector.

⁶ Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*, 7.

⁷ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 284.

⁸ Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*, 13.

Productivism referred to the insistence on increasing national wealth, rather than redistributing it. Chen and Wang dismissed landlord exploitation, wealth inequality, and especially class struggle as irrelevant concerns. Instead, they emphasized insufficient production and the absence of industrial technology. More relevant to the current discussion, Chiang exacted harsh taxes on the peasant population. In “Report from Xunwu,” Mao, the GMD’s most trenchant critic, detailed the grievances of a rural population facing economically extractive taxation. Mao compiled a damning list of government taxes: the land tax, the slaughter tax, the business protection tax, the tobacco and liquor stamp tax, the ox tax, and the gambling tax.⁹ The combined effect of these taxes was bitter resistance by the peasantry “to counteract the government’s grasping taxation of every family in the lineage.”¹⁰

Politically, General Chiang initiated the New Life Movement in 1934 as an attempt to invigorate the nationalist passions primarily of China’s urban dwellers. The New Life Movement was a Confucian moralistic campaign designed to instill self-discipline in people so they would serve the state.¹¹ In a 1936 speech Chiang proclaimed “the upbuilding of the nation” on the basis of “the eight great virtues – loyalty, filial piety, kindness, love, faithfulness, righteousness, peace, and justice.”¹² The New Life Movement aimed to instill virtue in the decadent cities, even closing down lascivious institutions like dance halls, and to improve the hygiene of Chinese urbanites and peasants alike through basic practices like washing faces and brushing teeth.

Chiang unveiled the New Life Movement in conjunction with the final push to exterminate the embattled Communists.¹³ To the extent that Guomindang propaganda penetrated

⁹ Mao, Tse-tung. *Report from Xunwu* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 183-188.

¹⁰ Mao, *Report from Xunwu*, 132.

¹¹ Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 257.

¹² Chiang, Kai-Shek. *North China Daily Herald*. November 4, 1936. 176

¹³ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 194 note 2.

to the countryside, it operated as a system of control. The *baojia* system of mutual surveillance required peasants to join collective neighborhood defense groups, or militias to guard against the Communists. *Baojia* revived a moribund practice from the Qing, and essentially co-opted loyal locals to report any dissension or otherwise subversive behavior against the state.¹⁴ As Chiang stated, “it is necessary to exploit the strength of the [baojia] system, to get the people of a locality to keep watch upon one another, voluntarily carrying out inspection work, so that lawless elements have nowhere to hide.”¹⁵

The authoritarian nature of the New Life Movement arose in its most odious form through the paramilitary Blue Shirts. As one might surmise from their name, borrowing from the Brown Shirts in Germany and the Black Shirts in Italy, the Blue Shirts constituted a fascist-inspired organization composed mostly of military personnel and Party members.¹⁶ Although the Blue Shirts never attained the power of their predecessors, Chiang himself favorably compared the New Life Movement to Mussolini’s efforts to revive the Roman imperium.¹⁷ The Blue Shirts exercised broad control over the mechanics of the movement. In the course of their efforts to “upbuild the nation,” the forces of the Blue Shirts destroyed countless newspapers and journals. In order to end decadence, they poured acid on the immodestly dressed.¹⁸ More generally, the Blue Shirts desired a strong Chinese state with further ties to the European fascist governments. In this their project overlapped with Chiang’s – “New Life combined Christian uplift rhetoric with military regimentation in order to fight social change.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Selden, *China in Revolution*, 133; Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 62.

¹⁵ Chiang, *Resistance and Reconstruction*, 196-197.

¹⁶ Zarrow, *China in Revolution*, 255; Hayford, *To The People*, 151.

¹⁷ Chiang, Kai-Shek. *North China Daily Herald*. May 18, 1936. 596.

¹⁸ Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 257.

¹⁹ Hayford, *To The People*, 152.

In sum, the New Life Movement inaugurated a period of extreme collectivism through the state, and a managed individualism through self-discipline. Even before the movement began, General Chiang aptly described the purpose of the varied campaign: “The most important point of fascism is absolute trust in a sagely, able leader... Therefore the leader will naturally be a great person and possess a revolutionary spirit, so that he serves as a model for all party members. Furthermore, each member must sacrifice everything, acting directly for the leader and the group, and indirectly for society, the nation, and the revolution.”²⁰ In developing the New Life Movement, Chiang achieved his goal of ousting factional rivals like Wang Jingwei and Chen Gongbo. In contrast, he was unable to decisively defeat the Communists, safely hidden in the mountains of the countryside, and he did almost nothing to staunch the encroaching Japanese.

The Nanjing Decade unraveled when the looming Japanese threat expanded into a full-scale invasion. In 1931 Japan wrested control of Manchuria, and in 1937, the Japanese proceeded rapidly to conquer Beijing, Shanghai, and the capital at Nanjing. In the wake of the threat the Communists and Nationalists agreed to a Second United Front, temporarily halting the civil war between them in order to concentrate on the Japanese. Desperate for soldiers, the GMD government conducted mass conscription of the rural population, and subjected peasants to forced labor to support the war effort. American General Wedemeyer, who was present in China at the time, noted that “conscription comes to the Chinese peasant like famine or flood, only more regularly – every year, twice – and claims more victims. Famine, flood, and drought compare with conscription like chicken pox with the plague.”²¹

²⁰ Quoted in Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 256.

²¹ Quoted in Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, 295.

Yet, when compared with the CCP, General Chiang and the GMD stubbornly pursued a relatively weak resistance policy of “waiting in preparation” for the Japanese onslaught. There were two reasons for this policy. First, the party core of urban elites likely preferred collaboration with the Japanese over social revolution led by the Communist forces. In fact, the former Nationalist and leader of the Executive Yuan, Wang Jingwei, formed a collaborationist government in Nanjing that functioned as Japan’s puppet. Second, the GMD feared Japanese military prowess and instead appealed to diplomatic channels and international public opinion. Much of the Western world sympathized with the Chinese experience of Japanese imperialism, especially after the Nanjing Massacre in which up to 300,000 Chinese people were killed, among other major atrocities. But international public opinion did not directly fight the war against Japan, Chinese peasants did, and the GMD was not alone in resisting repeated national humiliation.

The Chinese Communist Party shared much of its early history with the GMD, as it joined the First United Front in 1923. The CCP also accorded with the GMD on basic revolutionary strategy, identifying the coastal cities as the locus of the nation. Early CCP leaders like Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao adopted the idea that the urban proletariat would lead the Chinese revolution, while simultaneously organizing students.²² Factory workers and university students constituted a very weak class base in China in the 1920s, but then the CCP itself was a feeble faction. It was for this reason that the party actively lobbied for membership as a “bloc” within the Nationalist Party.

²² Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 282.

In his youth, future Communist leader Mao Zedong expressed sympathy for the traditional Marxist preference for urban organizing. As late as March 1926 the young radical said that the proletariat “represents China’s new productive forces, is the most progressive class in modern China, and has become the leading force in the revolutionary movement.”²³ Still, even at this time Mao was embedded in Hunan with the burgeoning peasant associations, acting both as participant and observer. In March of 1927 Mao delivered his findings on the Hunan peasant associations to a crucial party meeting, in “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan.” He called on the CCP to lend support to agricultural cooperatives and experiments in rural democracy, and dismissed criticism of the intermittent violence of the peasant uprisings. Mao clearly envisioned the peasantry, not the urban proletariat or the assorted gentry classes, as the microcosm of a unified China. The author presented peasants as citizens in a new state – namely, their own.²⁴ Chinese peasants, Mao predicted,

will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves... There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.²⁵

Sympathetic CCP strategists seized upon Mao’s report as a way of maneuvering out of irrelevance and into militarily useful territory. According to Selden’s rigorous analysis of the northern Shaanxi Province, party membership largely stagnated until 1931, as the leadership regrouped and focused on problems among the peasantry. Selden, indeed, considered peasant discontent the impetus to rural revolution, although he carefully qualified that the sources of that discontent varied regionally. The historian favorably described the program of land redistribution

²³ Mao, Tse-Tung. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung: Volume I* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), 18.

²⁴ Mao, *Selected Works*, 27.

²⁵ Mao, *Selected Works*, 24.

in 1934 and 1935. He indicated that the program, in which local cadres forcibly expropriated land from landlords, amassed peasant support for the guerilla campaign against General Chiang's Nationalists. During this period the GMD ruthlessly conducted the first and second "encirclement and annihilation campaigns," or counterinsurgency efforts directed at uprooting Communist bases of support.

Despite Selden's excessive reliance on sources within the CCP, his local account of Shaanxi widely accords with the Party's experience in southeastern Jiangxi Province. Mao spearheaded the Jiangxi Soviet, which served as the base area for his novel guerilla tactics against the Nationalists, in 1931. Mao contended that rich peasants and small landlords agreed with his party's land program: "They have united with the poor peasant class and risen up, creating the recent struggle for land revolution."²⁶ Still, the Jiangxi program of land redistribution included forcible seizure of landlord property.²⁷ Johnson, in opposition to both Selden and Mao, maintained that this more coercive program was not very effective. In any case, the Guomindang Army soon destroyed any existing revolutionary potential. By summer of 1934, Chiang's war against the Communists finally met success, and the forces behind the Jiangxi Soviet were forced to flee. Later party propagandists would mythologize the "Long March" from Jiangxi to the Yan'an base in Shaanxi. But the yearlong journey, in which Mao consolidated control of the party, was not a victory for the Communists, who sustained serious losses.

Now comfortably ensconced in the North China plains, the CCP quickly contended with yet another existential threat – the Japanese invasion. Here Johnson's argument comes to the fore, namely that "the CCP was the elite group that successfully placed itself at the head of the war-

²⁶ Mao, *Report from Xunwu*, 152.

²⁷ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 304.

mobilized peasantry and became the political beneficiary of peasant mobilization.”²⁸ There was certainly cause for spontaneous peasant mobilization. As the Japanese invading force pushed toward the interior, its depravity only deepened. After garnering control over rural areas the Japanese Army ordered “mopping up campaigns” that rooted out remaining vestiges of resistance. The central principle behind these campaigns was eloquently expressed by official army doctrine – “burn all, loot all, kill all.” In Johnson’s account, the CCP was merely a fortunate recipient of the peasant resistance that ensued. The Nationalist government’s detachment from rural China guaranteed its eventual downfall, as Japan overran most of the major coastal cities by the end of 1937. On the other hand, Johnson conceded the remarkable leadership of the CCP in repelling the invaders and “alleviating war-induced” anarchy.²⁹

Meanwhile, all of China was engaged in a desperate fight to preserve its existence. Against this backdrop, the GMD grew more and more suspicious of the CCP’s intentions concerning the peasantry. In 1939 the GMD imposed a virtual blockade on the CCP’s Yan’an base, severely restricting mobility of weapons and other essential goods. The Second United Front was a very fragile alliance of enemies, and in 1941 it finally dissolved in dramatic fashion. Tensions flared during the “New Fourth Army Incident” in which the Nationalist Army attacked the CCP’s smaller force for disobeying an order. When the GMD government announced the New Fourth Army’s dissolution in January 1941, the Second United Front survived only as a weakly observed truce.

Because the GMD attacked first during the “New Fourth Army Incident,” the CCP successfully orchestrated a propaganda campaign and was thereafter widely perceived as a

²⁸ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 71.

²⁹ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 5-7; Karl, *Mao Zedong and China*, 55.

martyr to the nation to the anti-Japanese resistance. Nevertheless, conditions at this time hardly favored the Communists. From 1941 to 1942 the Japanese adopted a “scorched-earth” policy in North China. By the end of 1942, the population of base areas under Communist control decreased markedly, from 44 million to 25 million. Despite the loss of guerilla base area and population, Johnson convincingly maintained that “the Communists reaped certain advantages from the fact that there was now hardly a village left in Hopei or [Shaanxi] that was not half-burned or worse.”

The CCP’s famed rectification (cheng feng) movement at the Yan’an guerilla base developed under these almost unbearable conditions, lasting from 1942 to 1944. The rectification movement at Yan’an demonstrated a dual character that splits scholarship along the lines of the Johnson/Selden debate. In contrast to official Chinese narrative, most Western academics emphasized the less salutary facts about the Yan’an rectification movement. In an attempt to eliminate Soviet influence and shore up control over the CCP, Mao initiated an intense campaign of “reeducation” that could be fairly characterized as brain-washing.³⁰ Mao’s campaign of thought reform targeted ideological deviants, who were then subjected to a process of “self-criticism” in small group study. Once they completed the humiliating process, reeducated party members experienced at least one of the following outcomes: reintegration, imprisonment, or execution.³¹ Widespread disagreement exists as to the data on the rectification purge, but the upper limit of estimates includes 10,000 killed.³² No matter the final tally, the Yan’an rectification resulted in an ideologically rigid CCP, and constituted the first signs of a cult of personality around Mao.

³⁰ Lieberthal, Kenneth. *Governing China: From Revolution to Reform* (New York City: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 47.

³¹ Karl, *Mao Zedong*, 67.

³² Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 45-52.

While Selden's skepticism that Yan'an constituted a purge is less than convincing, the historian more capably outlined the social policy associated with the Yan'an period, in a sense more relevant to the discussion at hand. Hundreds, if not thousands, of students and cadres from the cities were sent to the villages to witness and foster peasant mobilization and to help harvest grain.³³ The cultural purpose of the Yan'an rectification was to clamp down on dissent. In contrast, the social purpose of the program, known as the Yan'an Way, was to intensify and deepen peasant-party collaboration. The Yan'an Way did include a genuine attempt at institutionalizing local democracy through an electoral process. Additionally, Mao's New Democracy concept of the "mass line," in which party cadres both learned from and taught peasants, informed the reciprocal dynamic of rural reform. By any fair comparison with the Nationalist government, Yan'an was defined by increased peasant power and popular participation in the war effort and local governance. While it is impossible to corroborate the effectiveness of the efforts at Yan'an, given a dearth of materials, the CCP repeatedly manifested concern for the welfare of rural Chinese and egalitarian land distribution within particular villages. The resistance against the Japanese may have taken precedence, but the social revolution persisted during the Yan'an period.

Johnson, of course, considered social policy not an unnecessary condition to CCP success but an insufficient condition. "As a general rule, the Communists were not able to establish guerilla bases in regions that had no direct experience with the Japanese Army."³⁴ The universal presence of Japanese encroachment, in my judgment, confirms Johnson's thesis that the peasants encountered "physical pressures" and then mobilized for the defense of the nation. Johnson solidified his thesis with an adroit analysis of Chinese Communist propaganda, which

³³ Selden, *China in Revolution*, 157, 180-181.

³⁴ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 146.

concentrated on “national salvation” (*qiuguo*) rather than social revolution.³⁵ However, Selden’s evidence of the CCP’s wartime propaganda belies the notion that the party somehow forgot its socialist background during the war.

Often military force serves as the ultimate arbiter of historical development, to paraphrase Mao, so it is instructive to review the dramatic troop increases in the Chinese Communist Army. At the beginning of the war against the Japanese the CCP mobilized 90,000 soldiers, primarily peasant volunteers. By the end of the war in 1945 the Army had increased tenfold, to 860,000 soldiers.³⁶ While the GMD boasted a much larger army of four million on paper, its forces were comprised almost entirely of reluctant conscripts, many of whom deserted. Johnson is no doubt correct that most peasants joined the CCP’s army with the intention of defeating the Japanese, not necessarily achieving full communism. But Mao and the CCP formed a guerilla army, and the CCP’s military strength depended upon its support from and immersion in the peasant community. After the Japanese withdrew from occupied China, the Chinese Communists and Nationalists faced off in final battle for control of the nation. The result of that long-delayed conflict depended on which party addressed the tension between their core of urban intellectuals and the great mass of rural peasants.

Our story touched on two separate attempts to found the Chinese nation, by the Nationalists and the Communists. Interestingly, the trajectory of these political forces merged after the Japanese invasion. While the CCP depended on the peasant population since the White Terror of 1927, the Japanese occupation uprooted the GMD from its urban enclave at Nanjing. With the end of World War II and the Japanese Army’s withdrawal from occupied China, both

³⁵ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 4.

³⁶ Selden, *China in Revolution*, 286.

Chiang and Mao spurned efforts to preserve peace by the Soviet Union, the United States, and domestic constituencies. By the spring of 1946, the Chinese civil war erupted anew. Despite the Guomindang Army's considerable numerical advantage over the CCP's Red Army, the war was quickly decided. Many of the GMD's best trained troops deserted to join the Red Army in the strategic lynchpin of Manchuria. The support of the peasants of North China afforded the CCP new life, and again assured victory. In 1949 the Nationalists retreated to southern China near the CCP's original base areas. Finally, Chiang and a contingent of loyalists fled the mainland and established Republican rule in Taiwan; slight consolation for the loss of China.

On October 1st, 1949, Mao declared the foundation of the People's Republic of China at the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing.³⁷ Thousands of urban dwellers gathered to commemorate the inauguration of a newly unified nation-state, "China." Yet the crowd of Beijing revelers contributed almost nothing to the Chinese Revolution of the CCP. Some of them, nationalist urban intellectuals, retreated to the countryside amid the chaos of the warlord period. With the absence of any serious third force, only Chiang and the Nationalists remained as a contender for the idea of China.

In summation, the triumph of the CCP demands explanation in light of the Nationalists' distinct advantages in military prowess, economic might, and territorial control. In 1927, Chiang chose fatally to abandon the GMD's historical ties to popular movements. In the years afterward, the Nationalist government exacted harsh taxes on a very poor peasantry, and, after the Japanese invasion of 1937, conducted mass conscription that further alienated rural Chinese. Clearly, the urban intellectuals of the GMD judged the coastal cities more important than the countryside. Or,

³⁷ Karl, *Mao Zedong*, 72.

as Mao said after he gained power: “The cities stink of [Chiang Kai-Shek].”³⁸ In this statement Mao unwittingly unveiled his – and the CCP’s – idea of the nation. In 1927 political contingency forced the CCP into a fortuitous alliance with rural peasants, and with the Japanese invasion their interests converged even further. Policies directed at the perceived interests of peasants combined with a strategic war of attrition in order to create an agrarian nation-state called China.

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³⁸ Quoted in Zanasi, “Far from the Treaty Ports,” 131.

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