

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

Hu Sheng (*chief editor*)

Party History Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee

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A Concise History of the Communist Party of China was compiled by the Party History Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee, with Hu Sheng serving as chief editor. The book provides a systematic account of the CPC's first seventy years since its founding in July 1921, recounting the great achievements of the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party in the new-democratic revolution, the socialist revolution and socialist construction, as the narrative, seeking the truth from the facts, appraises the important events and people in the Party's history. The historic experiences of the Party are scientifically summarized and the lessons learned clearly spelled out. A great deal of new analysis and information are brought to the subject, particularly regarding Party history during the socialist period (1949 to the present). Accurate and dependable, the history sources the original archives, confirming facts with files and other original documents, providing the reader with the most authoritative and unbiased history of the CPC currently available.

The first five chapters introduce the tortuous but successful progress of the CPC in its early years, the triumphs of the Agrarian Revolu-

(Continued on the back flap)

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(Seventy Years of the CPC)

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The original Chinese edition of this book was published in August 1991 to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. Publication was approved by the CPC Central Committee's Leading Group for Work on Party History, headed by Yang Shangkun, then president of the People's Republic of China. The deputy head of the Leading Group, Hu Qiaomu, appraised the book:

I was very pleased to receive the manuscript of this book. It is a reasonably substantial book giving a comparatively complete history of the Party, a book that we have been long awaiting.

Hu Qiaomu noted in particular chapters Seven, Eight and Nine dealing with the Party's more recent history:

These three chapters addressed difficult topics. During the ten years following the Party's 8th National Congress [1956-66], there were many convolutions in Party history. The ten-year "cultural revolution" [1966-76] was tragic, though not everything in that period was bad. In the ten years of reform and opening to the outside world [1979-89], we scored great achievements, but two general secretaries of the CPC Central Committee made serious mistakes. A history must be objective. Having read these three chapters, I think I can say that this book is reliable and well worth reading, particularly because it realistically presents both historical events and the root causes of those events. Readers will find this to be a book devoid of propagandistic intent, that honestly recounts the history of the Party, giving food for thought. This book may be considered unique in its presentation of Party history. It is certainly unparalleled in its quality of writing.

The chief editor of *A Concise History of the Communist Party of China (Seventy Years of the CPC)* is Hu Sheng, director of the Party History Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee, and president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He is also the author of *Imperialism and Chinese Politics* and *From the Opium War to the May 4th Movement* (both published by the Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1985 and 1991, respectively).

This English edition is a translation of the first Chinese edition, published in August 1991 by the Press of the History of the Communist Party of China. Some textual modifications have been made for the English version and explanatory notes at the end of each chapter and an index have been added.

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Seventy years have passed since the Communist Party of China came into being. Over these seventy years, the Party has rallied the Chinese people around it and waged an unremitting and heroic struggle for national liberation, social progress and the people's well-being.

The struggle has never been easy. To make a victorious revolution and build a new society in a poor and backward country comprising a quarter of the earth's population, the Communist Party of China performed feats that astonished the world, encountering seemingly overwhelming difficulties and at times suffering major setbacks. But difficulties or setbacks of any kind could never hold back its advance; they only made the Party more steadfast and more mature.

The Chinese people have gained historic victories in revolution and socialist construction under the leadership of the Communist Party, and today they are forging confidently ahead towards the great goal of socialist modernization. The record of the past shows that the Party serves the people heart and soul and that it can provide the leadership that will enable them to master their own destiny and to make the country strong and prosperous.

Looking back over the past seventy years, the Chinese people are more convinced than ever that their choice of socialism as their goal and of the Communist Party to lead them there has been correct. Indeed, it is the inevitable product of China's modern historical development. The rich store of experience embodied in these last seventy years of history was accumulated by pioneers who sought the truth under the most difficult circumstances with no precedent to guide them, and it was paid for in the blood of innumerable martyrs. They deserve our ever enduring remembrance.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDING OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

I. THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF THE REVOLUTION OF 1911

In the middle of the 19th century, China was plunged in untold suffering and humiliation under the oppression of foreign capitalist and imperialist powers and of domestic feudal forces. The country was deprived of its sovereignty, and its economic lifelines were in the hands of foreigners. Faced with aggression by the Western powers, the feudal and autocratic Qing Dynasty, which had reigned over China for two hundred years, took no effective measures to defend the country. On the contrary, it suppressed all trends towards political and social progress and let the imperialist powers carve the country up at will. The Qing regime at its final stage, traitorous and corrupt, was detested by the people, because it strangled the country's vitality and kept them in misery. The Chinese entered the 20th century with the national humiliation of seeing their capital city, Beijing, occupied by the Eight-Power Allied Forces sent by Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy and Austria. The Chinese nation seemed to be on the verge of extinction.

The Chinese people, who had created a glorious and ancient civilization, could not endure such humiliation for long. In 1902, when the great writer Lu Xun was studying in Japan, he wrote these lines expressing the grief and indignation that filled the hearts of a great many Chinese patriots:

“My heart cannot evade the arrow of the god of love.

“A great storm is sweeping over my homeland in the darkness.

“I place my hopes in the cold stars, but they do not understand me.

“I offer my heart’s blood to my dear homeland.”

It was the double oppression of imperialism and feudalism that was the source of the suffering of the Chinese nation and the misery of the Chinese people. That is what hindered all social development and political progress. How could the country combat foreign aggression and win national independence? How could it be extricated from the darkness and ignorance perpetuated by the feudal, autocratic regime? How could it be lifted out of poverty and backwardness and made prosperous and strong? These were the principal questions that confronted semi-colonial, semi-feudal China, the principal questions that the Chinese progressives kept turning over in their minds.

Many brave men and women devoted themselves to the cause of national progress before the founding of the Communist Party of China. The Chinese people had never ceased trying to change the destiny of their motherland. However, their repeated struggles — the wars of resistance against foreign aggression, the peasants’ revolution of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in the middle of the 19th century, the Reform Movement of 1898¹ and the Boxer Uprising (the *Yi He Tuan* Movement) at the turn of the century which started from the lower strata of society and grew into a large-scale anti-imperialist patriotic movement — had all ended in failure. Many patriots bitterly regretted that their lofty ideals could not be attained.

Nevertheless, the wheel of history rolled on, constantly bringing new developments. As the national crisis deepened and new social forces, especially modern capitalist industry, began to grow in Chinese society, a new revolutionary movement was started under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, the forerunner of the Chinese democratic revolution.

Sun Yat-sen was a great patriot as well as a great democrat. When he established the small revolutionary group Society for the Revival of China (*Xing Zhong Hui*) in Honolulu in 1894, he issued a clarion call for “the revival of China.” In 1905 he

sponsored the founding of the Chinese Revolutionary League (*Zhongguo Tong Men Hui*). The League put forward a comprehensive political programme for the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic and worked hard to carry it out by revolutionary means. It pledged to “drive out the Tartars, revive the Chinese nation, establish a republic and equalize ownership of land.” The immediate objective of the revolution was to overthrow the government of the Qing Dynasty, which had already become a tool of the imperialist powers for the domination of China. Thus, the revolution was essentially anti-imperialist. It called for the overthrow of the feudal monarchy that had reigned in China for two thousand years. Before this time, some people had been so influenced by European and American ideas that they questioned the monarchy, but they had never dared envisage its overthrow and the dismantling of the social system it represented. Sun Yat-sen, however, held up the ideal of a democratic republic and set a new objective for the Chinese people. From then on, they began to struggle consciously for the establishment of an independent, democratic state. In Mao Zedong’s words, “Strictly speaking, China’s bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism was begun by Dr. Sun Yat-sen.”²

The Revolution of 1911 aimed at capitalist industrialization. Recalling it in 1924, the Manifesto of the 1st National Congress of the Kuomintang of China stated: “The objective of the revolution was not merely to overthrow the Manchus, but to carry out the transformation of China after their overthrow,” that is, “to achieve in the political domain the transition from an autocratic system to a democratic system and in the economic domain the transition from handicraft production to capitalist production.”³ It is important to note that while many Chinese were eager to learn from the West, Sun Yat-sen had become aware of certain drawbacks in the capitalist system of the Western countries. His conclusion was that “Europe and America are strong, but their people are impoverished” and that “a social revolution will take place before long.” Influenced by the socialist movement rising in the West, Sun Yat-sen tried to add some colour of socialism to

his programme, but whatever his intent, his proposal to “equalize ownership of land” could only lead to the development of capitalism in China.

For several years following its establishment, the Chinese Revolutionary League, together with other organizations under its influence, carried out revolutionary propaganda and agitation. The League allied itself with secret societies (especially the Triad Society and similar organizations in southern China) and with the New Army (a modernized force organized by the government of the Qing Dynasty after its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95) and launched a series of armed uprisings. The failure of each uprising expanded the influence of revolutionary ideas among the people throughout the country and deepened their hatred of the Qing government. A revolutionary situation was taking shape across the country.

The outbreak of the Revolution of 1911 and the success it attained proved that the imperialist powers could not arbitrarily control the destiny of China after all. The revolution was significant not only because it overthrew the Qing Dynasty, but because it put an end to the autocracy that had reigned in China for thousands of years and awakened the people to the concept of a democratic republic. One should never underestimate the role played by the Revolution of 1911 in promoting social progress in China and in liberating the thinking of the Chinese people. The Qing Dynasty had been not only the chief representative of the domestic feudal forces but also a tool employed by the foreign imperialists to dominate China. The people’s triumph over this feudal monarchy that had betrayed them destroyed the old, reactionary order and paved the way for revolutionary struggles in the days to come. In this sense, the victory achieved in the Revolution of 1911 was tremendous.

However, the Revolution of 1911 also had obvious weaknesses. It failed to set forth an explicit and comprehensive political programme to combat foreign imperialist aggression and the feudal social system; it failed to arouse the labouring masses who were the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population; and it failed to form a strong revolutionary party that could success-

fully lead it to its logical conclusion. This was because the bourgeoisie in China was too feeble. It had ties with the imperialist and feudal forces that could not be completely severed, and it was almost totally divorced from the labouring masses. The bourgeois revolutionaries therefore had neither the courage nor the strength to carry the struggle against imperialism and feudalism to the end.

The Revolution of 1911 ended in a compromise with the old forces. The imperialist forces in China were as strong as ever, and there was no great social upheaval in the countryside. The Republic of China was founded, but the fruit of revolution fell into the hands of the Northern warlords headed by Yuan Shikai, who was favoured by the imperialists. China was still a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society, still a country of dire poverty and backwardness. Sun Yat-sen said bitterly, “The political and social darkness and the corruption of every description are even worse than in the Qing Dynasty, and the people are becoming increasingly impoverished.”⁴ The revolution had not attained its desired goal, so in that sense it was a failure.

Nevertheless, the Revolution of 1911 holds an honoured place in modern Chinese history. As historical materialists who uphold Marxism, members of the Communist Party of China will never forget the contributions made by all the revolutionary pioneers before the founding of the Party and as a matter of fact, the Revolution of 1911 was the most important revolution preceding the people’s revolution led by the CPC. Looking back over the entire course of China’s modern revolutionary history, we can see that the Revolution of 1911 did bear fruit after all. The success of that revolution encouraged the Chinese people to keep up their struggle. On the other hand, its failure taught the progressives among them that it was impossible to build a bourgeois republic under the historical conditions of the time. They came to realize that to win the independence and prosperity of the country and the freedom and happiness of the people, they had to explore a new path.

Mao Zedong made clear the importance of the Revolution of 1911 when he said, “While studying the history of the Communist

Party of China, we should study materials concerning the Revolution of 1911 and the May 4th Movement before the founding of the Party. Otherwise, we cannot understand the development of history.”⁵

It was only ten years between the outbreak of the Revolution of 1911 and the founding of the Communist Party of China. Almost all of the first generation of CPC revolutionaries had taken part in the Revolution of 1911 or been deeply influenced by it. These veteran Communists and many democrats who later cooperated with the Communist Party took that revolution as their point of departure. Recalling his own ideological evolution, the Communist Lin Boqu wrote:

“Before the Revolution of 1911, I believed that there would be peace and tranquillity across the land if only we overthrew the monarchy. But after I took part in the revolution and experienced setbacks over and over again, the goal of democracy I had been trying to attain was still far away. It was through bitter experience that I gradually came to realize I was in a blind alley and that I finally chose communism. This is not the experience of only one person; many people like me can be found in the revolutionary ranks.”⁶ Thus, the victories of the new-democratic revolution and of socialism in China can be regarded as the continuation and development of the Revolution of 1911.

II. THE EARLY STAGE OF THE NEW CULTURAL MOVEMENT AND THE INITIAL DISSEMINATION OF MARXISM

After the failure of the Revolution of 1911, Chinese progressives were in despair, at a loss what to do. Their dreams were shattered, because the founding of the Republic of China did not bring about the desired national independence, democracy and social progress. In 1915, when World War I was at its height, Japan seized the opportunity to put forward “Twenty-One De-

mands" in a bid to obtain exclusive control of China. Yuan Shikai, the chief of the Northern warlords, restored the monarchy and proclaimed himself emperor. Zhang Xun, a former senior official of the Qing Dynasty, supported an attempt by the de-throned Emperor Xuantong to stage a comeback. While the imperialist powers were in bitter rivalry in China, the domestic warlords were intensifying their internecine warfare to set up separatist regimes. Going against the trend of the times, certain intellectuals advocated the worship of Confucius and the study of the Confucian canon. One after another, dramatic events succeeded each other on the Chinese stage. Describing the circumstances of the time in broad outline, Mao Zedong wrote: "Their repeated struggles, including such a country-wide movement as the Revolution of 1911, all ended in failure. Day by day, conditions in the country got worse, and life was made impossible. Doubts arose, increased and deepened."⁷

The reality was grim. The people carried out hard struggles and made great sacrifices, but they did not obtain what they had anticipated. A bourgeois democratic republic was not a panacea for all the ills of China. Multiple political parties, the parliamentary system and other institutions copied from the West were tried out in the early years of the Republic of China, but they failed to solve any practical problems and only became instruments employed by different factions of warlords, bureaucrats and politicians in their scramble for power and profit. Utter despair replaced the previous hopes. Yet this bitter experience had its positive side for the progressives. Since they found the old road impassable, they began to look for a new way out. A greater revolutionary storm was brewing and would soon descend upon the land.

The early stage of the new cultural movement — the period before the May 4th Movement of 1919 — presaged the coming storm.

In September 1915 Chen Duxiu, who had participated in the Revolution of 1911, founded the magazine *Youth* (later renamed *New Youth*) in Shanghai, touching off a new cultural movement. In January 1917 Cai Yuanpei became the President of Beijing