Chapter Six

EVALUATION OF THE REVOLUTION: CONCLUSIONS

The Manchu dynasty had met with the same fate as had preceded the preceding dynasties, many of which had been as great in splendour and wealth. The Great Pure Dynasty proved to be as ephemeral and transitory in the long march of Chinese history as the mighty empires of T’ang and Han. But this time there was a difference, a major, indeed a revolutionary difference. There was no dynasty to succeed, no Emperor to ascend the Dragon Throne. The Mandate of Heaven had been withdrawn from Manchu rulers but was not conferred on any other royal house either. Instead, for this first time in Chinese history, a republican system of government rose up. The revolutionaries had succeeded in their purpose in overthrowing the dynasty and supplanting it by a non-dynastic system. A revolution which swept away the more than 2000-year old system of monarchy and dynasties, whatever its other shortcomings, cannot be regarded as insignificant. Looked at from any angle, it was a tremendous change which had no earlier parallel or precedent.

The 1911 Revolution has often been regarded as a failure and the causes of its failure have been analysed by a number of writers. This is, however, looking at only one angle, the aspect of the difficulties of the working of republican institutions, of the trial and tribulations of the Chinese people in evolving and developing a new system. Sun Yat-sen’s political and economic
ideas met with stiff resistance from not only his enemies but also his own camp-followers (who did not believe in them). But this failure was only one side of the picture. The basic aim of abolishing the dynastic system and substituting it by a republican system was successfully achieved. The year 1911 marked the beginning of a new phase; the old system could never be revived. The polity of China had undergone a fundamental transformation. Yuan Shih-k'ai tried to revert to the old days and establish his own dynasty but the effort ended in an ignominious failure. The fact that the dynastic monarchy had been destroyed for ever was no mean achievement.

No doubt there was a period of war-lordism and near chaos following the 1911 Revolution. The democratic institutions which the Revolution was expected to usher in still remained a distant ideal and the spirit of autocracy continued to pervade political and administrative institutions. But it must also be remembered that nowhere in the world has the change from absolute autocracy to democratic forms been smooth or uneven. It is only through constant struggle that new democratic forms and habits of thinking are able to transplant the entrenched traditional ideas and institutions. In England in the struggle between autocratic rule and democratic urges of the people many heads rolled in the dust, including that of an Emperor. In France too violence and bloodshed plagued the country for years and decades before the republican system could be said, if at all, to have been firmly established. To some extent the troubled period after 1911 could also be regarded as inevitable in the battle between the old and the new,
between ideas and institutions having the sanction of tradition and usage and those which were new but were being pushed forward by the inexorable march of the times. The power of the new forces, symbolized by the republican system in China, may be seen from the fact that no subsequent attempt to bring back the old system succeeded.

This was not the only positive aspect of the 1911 Revolution - that of abolishing the system of absolute monarchy. The 1911 Revolution was also a clear evidence of the gathering struggle against Confucianism and the traditional system of education as well as political and economic philosophy; it was a landmark in the process of modernization of China. The intellectual revolt against the cramping straitjacket of traditional scholastic studies and the anti-imperialist resurgence that exploded in May 1919 was not a bolt from the blue. The May 4th movement did not come unexpectedly without any ground having been prepared. It was a logical consequence of the 1911 Revolution. The latter did not directly concentrate attack on Confucianism and the old literary formalism, but its assault on many of the institutions that perpetuated the old system paved the way for demolishing the base too. It did not directly struggle against foreign imperialism but its political philosophy and the policies advocated by its chief promoter, Sun Yat-sen, aroused further consciousness against the danger from foreign powers. By seeking to subvert the existing political institutions, the Revolution also subverted the traditional learning which had given rise to those institutions and by attacking the ruling dynasty for failure to preserve the
sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, the revolutionaries anticipated the coming ground swell of resistance against unequal treaties and encroachments on Chinese rights.

Also, as a result of the 1911 Revolution, there emerged a business class with considerable more power and influence than before and with fewer of the restrictions of the past framework that had shackled its activities. It was no longer at the lowest rung of the social ladder but had instead climbed to a position as important as almost that of any other class. The native industry was still hampered by unequal privileges enjoyed by foreign traders and manufacturers, but the economic competition between the two became increasingly sharper. It manifested itself in railroad building, mining, banking, textile industry, and a host of other fields.

In nutshell one might say that the Revolution was anti-Manchu, anti-monarchic and anti-Confucian and that it advocated nationalism, republicanism and modernization. Taking the last first, the chief motivating force of the Revolution was to modernize the country in order to be able to face the crisis threatening the country's independence. The revolutionaries stood not only for modern industry, modern communications system and modern defence, but also for modern political and economic institutions which were frankly recognised to be the real source of Western strength. The Revolution aimed at modernization in all its aspects and in this respect it can be claimed that while still not able to introduce full-scale modernization, the Republicans did push it to a far greater extent than would have been possible under the old system. The 1911 Revolution did this
much more effectively than the "self-strengtheners" or the "reformers" were able to do. The chief reason for that was that neither of the latter two made a frontal assault on the old system and ideas. The "self-strengtheners" rejected the modern political and economic ideas and systems while the "reformers" wanted the change to be within the confines of the basic Confucian mould. The 1911 Revolution by boldly attacking the old politico-economic system and institutions directly was able to shake their foundations in a more thorough manner than could the efforts of the former.

The Revolution was also amongst the first violent manifestations of Chinese nationalism. The stirrings of Chinese nationalism had been heard since the Opium war. Reform Movement was one facet of it; so was the Boxer revolt. But by 1911 Chinese nationalism had become a definite, concrete force and its first target was Manchu rule. To some extent Chinese nationalism became identified with anti-Manchuism. This was both the strength and weakness of the revolutionary movement. Since the Manchus constituted a small minority but ruled with a heavy hand, discriminating against the overwhelming majority group, the Hans (generally referred to as the Chinese), it was bound to arouse the ire of the latter against the rule of a tiny minority. But what lent particular edge to the wrath of the majority group was the Manchu failure to keep the foreign "barbarian" at bay. Thus Manchu rule which was thought to have proved incapable of preserving the independence of the country and which seemed to stand in the way of the modernization and consequent strengthening of the country became in the eyes of
many Chinese the chief stumbling block in the path of progress. Chinese nationalism directed its fury first against that rule. Since the Manchus had come from the borderlands, their rule could easily be condemned as "alien rule". Of course, it was only a matter of time before Chinese nationalism directed its attention also to the unequal treaties. The 1911 Revolution spurred this rising nationalism and constituted a milestone in the development of Chinese nationalism.

The Revolution also gave a spurt to the development of the press and political parties in China, although very soon Yuan Shih-k'ai attempted to throttle both in their infancy. For the origin of the modern press in China the credit must go to the Reform Movement, particularly to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, who may rightly be described as the father of modern journalism in China. It was K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao who first used the power of the printed word for propagating their views. But the Revolution provided greater scope for the development of modern journalism. The revolutionaries also made great use of newspapers and magazines to propagate their views. In the mainland they distributed their magazines clandestinely and in overseas territories openly, thus reaching a much wider audience than would have been otherwise possible. Wherever there was a revolutionary organization, it also had its own journal or paper. Scores of papers had thus mushroomed between 1900-1911. The tug-of-war between the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists
(the erstwhile reformers) before 1911 was also conducted through the press. (1) Both had their own papers attacking each other's policies. The Republican paper Min-pao played an important role in tilting the balance against the constitutionalists among overseas Chinese. The Revolution by overthrowing the old despotic system widened the scope for the development of an independent press. (This was, however, curbed shortly afterwards by Yuan Shih-k'ai's betrayal of the constitution and the rise of warlordism).

The Revolution also provided scope for the development of political parties in China. By establishing a republican system and providing for freedom of speech and association in the constitution, the revolution had laid the groundwork for the emergence and development of a party system. Indeed many political parties did grow up immediately after the Revolution. Apart from the T'ung-meng-hui, just before the Revolution the Comrades Association for Petition for a Parliament sprang up as an open political party. After the Revolution the T'ung-meng-hui also became into an open political party, and the Comrades' Association converted itself into the Friends of the Constitution (Hsien-yu-hui). This split up later into two parties, the Republican Unification Party and the Citizens' Harmonious Progressive Society. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao also organized a party called the Chin-pu-tang (Progressive Party). (2) This is only a brief outline of some

(1) See Chapter 2, section on REFORMERS VS REVOLUTIONARIES.
(2) Ku Chung-hsiu, Chung-hua min-kuo k'ai-kuo shih (Shanghai, 1918) 97-100.
of the political parties in post-1911 period merely to draw
attention to the fact that the Revolution had opened the way for
the emergence of modern political party system in China. Many
of these parties were loose-knit organization with some common
membership; many had no well-defined political programme or
ideology; some of them were based more on personalities than on
ideology. But, all the same, a beginning had been made and the
1911 Revolution had made the growth of political parties possible.
It was Yuan Shih-k'ai counter-revolution which frustrated the
gradual development of a party system.

Having put the 1911 Revolution in its proper perspective
we can now go on to consider the weaknesses and the failures of
the Revolution. First of all it may be noted that the revolution-
aries lacked unified thinking on the political problems of the
day and that the Revolution lacked a coherent and acceptable
philosophy beyond the overthrowing of the Manchu dynasty and the
establishment of a republic. The only philosophy it could lay
claim to was provided by Sun Yat-sen, with his Three People's
Principles, but many members of the revolutionary party had no
faith in those principles. For them the only fight was against
"alien" Manchu rule and they had little use for Sun's principle of
min-sheng (people's livelihood) -- a form of socialism which Sun
hoped would suit the conditions of China. They had no alternative
philosophy to offer except that of opportunism and in the very
moment of victory started compromising with the anti-Republican
forces for which they had to pay dearly. The negative policy of
merely opposing the Manchus made them blind to the prerequisites of a democratic society. Many of them thought that any Chinese would do to replace a Manchu. They did that in the case of Li Yuan-hung and they repeated it in the case of Yuan Shih-k'uai.

The T'ung-meng-hui was a conglomeration of forces and personalities whose chief objective was to eliminate the alien dynasty. It was almost a sort of broad united front of people and groups whose minimum common point of agreement was the need to topple Manchu rule. This held them together and as soon as that objective was reached the members were pulled in different directions and the latent differences of approach came to the fore. This was not of course an isolated experience of China. In most countries of Asia the first pulls of nationalism united different people and groups together until they split again once the common enemy had been removed. In India, to take just one instance, the Indian National Congress was also such a broad-based national organization within whose ranks were such diverse elements as industrialists, landlords, peasants, workers, socialists and even communists. The struggle against British imperialism had united them on the same platform but as soon as that struggle was over, the differences became predominant and many groups left the Congress. It was for this reason that after independence Gandhi advised the Congress to disband itself so as to allow new alignments on the basis of economic policies. In China too, as has been noted earlier, Manchu rule became the rallying point of Chinese nationalism which united diverse elements and as soon
as that rule was brought to an end the unity of the nationalists disappeared.

Not only was there no real unity in the nationalist camp, but there were acute differences over major issues. These largely stemmed from different objectives and expectations for different people. For Sun Yat-sen the revolution was only the first step in clearing the way for the abolition of an autocratic system in order to reconstruct the country on sound democratic lines, particularly with a view to raising the living standards of the people, and for this he had an economic philosophy symbolized by the slogan of "people's livelihood". He visualized large scale construction programmes which would make China a strong and independent country. But he also gave the slogan of race-nationalism (Min-tzu chu-i) which made the House of Nurhachi the immediate target of attack and rallied together diverse elements in the T'ung-meng-hui but who did not share his other political and economic ideas. It was not insignificant that at the time of the establishment of the T'ung-meng-hui some members suggested the addition of "Anti-Manchu" before it, and that Sun Yat-sen had to use all his persuasive powers and influence to get his Three People's Principles written into the plank of the T'ung-meng-hui. (3) These elements did not get any more converted to Sun's political and economic philosophy after joining the T'ung-meng-hui.

(3) See Chapter 2, section on SAN-MIN-CHU-I AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF T'UNG-MENG-HUI.
The demands of revolutionary activity precluded any systematic educative propaganda by Sun among the members of his revolutionary party. The result was that the diverse elements remained diverse and no unified thinking emerged among the leaders. Some of them were decidedly opposed to Sun's principles of democracy and people's livelihood. They had joined the T'ung-meng-hui only in order to oppose the Manchus, and, later, split away from the T'ung-meng-hui, formed other parties or supported Yuan Shih-k'ai in his struggle against the National Assembly. (4) Apart from factionalism, provincialism also plagued the revolutionary organization. Even while the struggle against the Manchu dynasty was on, Sun himself was attacked by Chang Ping-lin, T'ao Ch'eng-chang and others for showing provincial prejudices, and the Kuant-fu-hui, particularly dominated by the Chekiang revolutionaries, broke away from the T'ung-meng-hui and was not reunited with it until on the eve of the Revolution itself. (5) In Chekiang and Anhwei some of the revolutionaries like Hsü Hsi-ling disdained unity with the T'ung-meng-hui, but even in many other places there was no real direction from the central headquarters. In the Wuhan area, for instance, the revolutionaries among army circles maintained little actual contact with the central leaders who had only the faintest notion of the actual state of affairs there.

(4) As for instance Chang Ping-lin's support to Yuan Shih-k'ai at the time of the negotiations between Sun Yat-sen and Yuan. Tsao Ya-p'o, Wuch'ang ko-ming chen-shih (Shanghai, 1930); (cheng-pien) 633-6.

(5) See Chapter 2, section on TROUBLES OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES.
The differing motive-forces were evident also in the writings published in Min-pao, the organ of the T'ung-meng-hui. People like Ch'en T'ien-hua were not so much concerned with anti-Manchuism as the threat to the Chinese nation from foreign powers and they wanted the country to embark upon large-scale modernization in order to become strong and avoid becoming a colony of the foreign powers. To them the struggle against Manchu rule was necessary only in order to achieve the latter objective. Whereas to men like Chang Ping-lin the fight against Manchu rule was the primary objective and when Chang became the editor of Min-pao the anti-Manchu overtures became sharper and more violent. He even suggested recourse to Buddhism in order to fight the Manchus. (6)

It was, therefore, not surprising that as soon victory was in sight many members of the T'ung-meng-hui faltered in their purpose and were prepared to go to any lengths to compromise with the traditional forces. They thought that the end of Manchu rule was enough and that there was no further need to carry on a battle against the conservatives and the militarists; on the other hand they seemed to be keen to make a deal with them to enjoy the fruits of victory. Even before Sun had arrived in the country, from U.S.A., they had expressed their willingness (as pointed out in Chapter 5) to make Yuan Shih-k'ai President of the Chinese Republic if Yuan were prepared to break with the Manchu dynasty, regardless of whether he believed in the republican principles or not. No doubt to some extent the Republicans were concerned about

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(6) Chapter 2, section on SAN-MIN-CHU-I AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF T'UNG-MENG-HUI.
the armed strength of the Pei-yang army and even Sun Yat-sen himself was anxious to avoid a civil war between the North and the South. No doubt also that some of the revolutionaries were worried about the danger of foreign powers utilizing conditions of disorder and civil war to penetrate further into China. But it is also true that many in the T'ung-meng-hui did not see the need for carrying the battle against Yuan's forces to the bitter end because their own faith in and knowledge of republican principles and democratic institutions was not deep enough.

The weaknesses of the 1911 Revolution were in no small measure a failure of leadership. Indeed the revolutionaries had very, very few really outstanding leaders who could play the type of energetic, dominating role that was necessary at that time. It is no exaggeration to say that the Republican leadership was mostly inept and incompetent. Even a perusal of the record of the various uprisings (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) shows that time and again the same mistakes were made; most of the revolts fizzled out for similar reasons. Staff work generally failed at the most crucial moments; contacts were snapped when required the most; dates for uprisings were continually changed; and all in all there was generally great confusion in the revolutionary camp on the eve of projected revolt. This was obviously an indication of the weak and untrained leadership of the revolutionaries who did not seem to profit too greatly from years of experience after the Ch'ing humiliation in the Boxer fiasco. When finally the Revolution did succeed it was hardly the handi-
work of central leadership; it was the result of province-wise revolts led successfully by comparatively unknown and insignificant local revolutionaries.

Again, the quality of revolutionary leadership was at least partly responsible for the kind of change that had taken place as a result of the Revolution. Everywhere effective power came to be vested in the provincial assemblies. These assemblies had been created by the erstwhile rulers and their members were drawn from the conservative, landed classes with a fair sprinkling of the gentry and the constitutionalists. But they became the mainstay of the legislative and administrative machinery of the revolutionaries. Invariably the same pattern (noted in Chapters 4 and 5) was repeated everywhere. The New Army overthrew the existing Ch'ing rule and called together the provincial assembly entrusted with the task of establishing a new military government with the help of the revolutionaries. The provincial assembly became the chief political organ in the province and the seat of the new order. With its conservative complexion and composition it was not a fit agency for introducing republican and democratic forms of governments.

Moreover, the Republicans had done very little thinking on the type of institutions that should exist in a republican system. They had pinned their hopes on a republican form of government but had not evolved the political and administrative institutions that would make it possible for the republican system to succeed. They had given little thought to overhauling the
administrative machinery to suit the new system of government, nor did they spell out a new political machinery which would be more responsive to the requirements of the new governmental system. Even Sun Yat-sen had not dealt with this problem in any detail and all that he had suggested was a three-staged development, from military unification to party tutelage and then to the stage of real, complete democracy. But even he had failed to adequately realise the problem of providing the institutional framework to the republican system. Most of the others were supremely vague, if not completely ignorant of the problem. The result was that when the Republic was ushered only the skeleton was there: the flesh and blood were missing. No wonder the Republic had such a shaky start and was soon swamped by the machinations of its enemies. Neither the old institutions were thoroughly demolished so as to eliminate their power of mischief, nor were new institutions evolved to strengthen the foundations of the new system.

Ironically, the new order and the manner of its establishment contributed considerably to the rise of war-lordism. The Revolution had been spearheaded by elements of the New Army raised by the Manchu rulers and but for their participation the success of the uprisings in various provinces was doubtful. It was they who had provided the necessary military muscle to overthrow the Manchu government and saved the revolt from being crushed. On the other hand, those provinces which did not fall to the Republicans were saved only by an equally superior military force -- the Pei-yang army trained by Yuan Shih-k'ai. Thus the predominant elements in
this peculiar balance of power were the two military forces ranged on opposite sides. This gave an inordinately large voice to the military leaders in the affairs of state. Yuan Shih-k'ai, who had in any case no faith in a republic, shrewdly took advantage of this situation by repeated displays of the armed might of his Pei-yang army. But even in the Republican camp many military leaders thought that since they had played an important role in bringing about the revolution they were entitled to the fruits of victory and to a dominating say in governmental matters. (7) Their ambitions were whetted like those of Yuan Shih-k'ai's Pei-yang clique. The seeds of war-lordism lay in the role played by the army in the Revolution of 1911 and the manner of the establishment of the Republic with the arch-militarist Yuan Shih-k'ai as the President. The Republic from the beginning had been handed over to persons who had no use for those new-fangled ideas.

One more feature of the 1911 Revolution was its ignoring the aspect of opposing the advances of foreign powers. The anti-Manchu aspect had been played up almost to the exclusion of other needs of the Revolution. There is no doubt that Sun Yat-sen and many of his comrades were acutely aware of the danger from the foreign powers but they avoided a direct struggle against it. Sun had various reasons to do so. Sun did not want to fight at two many-fronts at the same time. The Manchu dynasty was a powerful

(7) Note, for instance, the concentration on the army by Sun Wu, Chang Chen-wu as well as Chiang Li-wu in order to increase their power. Chapter 5, 251.
front by itself and he did not want to take on more enemies. Sun thought it unwise to simultaneously fight against two powerful enemies and in his view the need to overthrow the Manchu rule assumed primary importance because without that no steps could be taken to recreate a strong new China to face the foreign powers. According to Liu Chung-wen, an associate of Sun Yat-sen, Sun's view was that the struggle against the Manchu dynasty was also indirectly a struggle against foreign imperialism and that the struggle against the latter would be taken up after the first struggle had been successfully ended. (8)

There is no doubt, however, that at that time even Sun Yat-sen had a rather faulty view of the nature of the threat that China faced from the foreign powers. Sun thought that foreign powers were encroaching on Chinese rights only because China was weak and its effete rulers were refusing to modernize the country. He believed that if it had a strong, progressive government intent on the modernization and industrialization of the country, the foreign powers would willingly co-operate with it and help it in its efforts to become modern and strong. This was a view shared by many others of his comrades. In fact some of them had even a more idealistic view of this question. For instance, at the time of the P'ing-hsiang uprising in Hunan in 1906, revolutionary propaganda suggested that foreign powers would immediately recognize the revolutionaries provided they just could claim a strip

of territory and claimed that the foreign powers had also supported the Taiping rebellion. (9) The faulty understanding of the role of the foreign powers narrowed the scope of the 1911 Revolution.

One of the most serious failings of the 1911 Revolution was the lack of popular association and participation which alone could have prevented the Revolution from being derailed. Most of the earlier revolutions had a mass base; they had sprung from the masses and had been sustained by their support. The Taiping revolution and the Boxer revolt had all been mass peasant revolts. Millions of peasants were involved in those rebellions and they could claim popular participation on a scale not available to the 1911 Revolution. The 1911 Revolution was led, not by peasants, but by students, intellectuals, overseas Chinese, and military leaders -- all mostly from the educated middle class. The only mass character that the revolutionary movement achieved was the result of the participation of some of the secret societies whose membership was predominantly from the peasantry. But even their participation had not made it a genuinely peasant movement. One difficulty, of course, was the inevitable secret nature of the movement. Since open political activity invited swift retribution, the task of mass propaganda and education about the aims of the revolution could not be undertaken, but even so the revolution lacked a mass base, let alone mass participation.

This was because of the essentially urban leadership that dominated the councils of the T'ung-meng-hui. The masses while

(9) HHKM, II, 523-32.
alienated from the Ch'ing dynasty and desiring a change looked on passively when the drama of the revolution was being unfolded.

Not that Sun Yat-sen was not aware of the problem. He had included the slogan of people's livelihood in the programme of the T'ung-meng-hui in order to arouse mass consciousness and sympathy and he had sought active co-operation with the secret societies so as to secure peasant association with his revolution. It was apparent that he wanted to make the revolutionary movement as broad-based as possible. But he did not succeed in his purpose. The peasant masses, or even the city masses, did not take part in any significant numbers. They were not hostile; in some cases they were sympathetic; but they did not directly participate. Their role was more that of benevolent spectators. Lu Hsün has written brilliant pieces on the situation that prevailed at the time of the Revolution. He is particularly devastating in his well-known piece, The True Story of Ah Q. Ah Q was regarded as a half-idiotic peasant proletarian. He was the poorest peasant in the village, a real scum of the earth in the eyes of the landlords and the rich peasants of his village. Ah Q was instinctively for the Revolution, although he knew little about it or its aims, but as soon as the Revolution succeeded, Ah Q was taken to the gallows under the new dispensation, whereas the landlord-gentry class of the area flocked around the new order and dominated the Revolution, once it had succeeded. (10)

(10) Jen-min wen-hsueh ch' u -pan sh e (pub.), Lu Hsün ch' uan-chi (Peking, 1956) I, 72-114.
Similarly in another story called Yao (Medicine) Lu Hsün describes the ignorance of the masses about the nature of the Revolution and mentions how a poor city dweller tried to get a few drops of the blood of a revolutionary, who was being sent to the gallows by the authorities, because, according to superstitious belief, his ailing son would get cured if he ate a piece of bread dipped in man's blood. (11) And the revolutionary was supposed to be laying down his life for these very poor masses! This lack of popular association and participation made it easier for the enemies of the Revolution to frustrate its real aims and objectives. These were some of the major failings of the 1911 Revolution. However, it may be said that despite all these limitations, the Revolution succeeded in destroying the dynastic and monarchical system and in pushing forward the movement for modernization and the reconstruction of a strong, new China.

(11) Ibid., 25-34.