

1 Culture and Politics

Before this disintegrative process was set in full motion, it seems reasonable to understand China as a system in which the state, society, and the arts were viewed as inseparable parts of a whole . . . the state and its attendant bureaucracy were expected to be not only sources of ultimate temporal authority but also the perpetuator of ethical and aesthetic norms. . . .¹

Nationalism is not one universal system of thought. It is a complex system of values embedded in community self-perception evolved over time. Ben Anderson describes nations as “imagined communities.”² When national communities experience rapid changes, national imaginations are transformed. Yet in their new national imaginations, the force of tradition, of inherited culture, remains tangible. We should bear this in mind when discussing Chinese nationalism.

In the 1910s the New Culture and May 4th movements articulated two tactical concerns in China—namely, cultural and political. Leaders of the New Culture Movement stressed the unity of culture and society, articulating the view that cultural renaissance was the *a priori* to political rebirth.³ Their students, activists of the May 4th movement, did not reject the importance of culture, but changed the emphasis from cultural renaissance to political action.

The disintegrative process created a deepening sense of unease and uncertainty within the national community, an uncertainty created by the absence of a polity that traditionally defined overall ethical and aesthetic norms. How deep down did this sense of unease go, this feeling of the loss of a national identity? Western scholars of China present varying perceptions. In *Region and Nation*,⁴ Dianne Lary explains the warlord phenomenon as one visible limit when the nation is broken into its regional parts. In *China Turned Rightside Up*⁵

Ralph Thaxton perceives that disintegration had reached the village level, arguing that the emergence of communist power in the countryside could be equated with the rebuilding of a moral order at the village level by a new political force that redefined communal norms. Is this not suggesting that social revolution in the Chinese village followed some recognizable, traditional patterns?

Some Chinese intellectuals, observes Schneider, were more optimistic in consciously distinguishing between the realms of politics and culture, refusing to accept that there was a parallel between the fragmentation of state and the fragmentation of culture. This optimism led them to the defense of “national essence,” a notional term expressing the belief that Chinese culture transcended the life span of any one political structure.⁶ In their view Chinese identity was essentially cultural. Leaders of the New Culture Movement shared the view that culture was the foundation of society. They argued for a cultural rebirth, a renaissance, to precede the birth of a new political structure.⁷ To them there could be no new nation without a new culture.

Among fellow culturalists the terms of debate between conservatives and radicals were those of classical revival or of intellectual enlightenment, yet both saw the West as a source of intellectual inspiration. In spite of their professed preoccupation with cultural issues, these protagonists shared a common objective of revitalizing political China through cultural action. Cultural activism was decidedly a means to an end, a means to reestablish the traditionally pivotal role of intellectuals in defining ethical norms for state and society.

Cultural rebirth, in retrospect, was inseparable from the process of political reintegration. The liberal intellectuals of the New Culture Movement did not plan to introduce a party state, yet both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the reorganized Guomindang (GMD) claimed inspirations from the New Culture and May 4th Movements. The political and cultural disintegration of traditional China, under the two-pronged attack of internal malaise and external encroachment, brought fragmentation to the intellectual scene. This intellectual crisis, however, generated a vibrant intellectual environment for debate and liberal thinking. Intellectual revitalization proceeded within the pervading atmosphere of a Chinese response. The new liberal environment became a means toward an end. Liberalism acquired a utilitarian purpose in the decade of the 1911 revolution; liberalism became a political strategy.

Liberal tendencies of the New Culture Movement were noticeably eclectic, as intellectuals experimented with new ideas. Advocates

of cultural revolution, while championing the demise of old society, were dedicated to the creation of an alternative cultural political tradition. Their revolution was true to traditional form. The liberal intellectual approaches of the 1910s and the authoritarian ways of the GMD and the CCP were different facets of this selfsame process towards national reintegration. The liberal campuses in Beijing, the military academy at Whampoa⁸, and the Resistance University at Yanan (Kangda) were engaged in the common enterprise of training a new national elite. These elite groups each claimed ultimate authority to redefine community norms.

This study on the political life of the Whampoa Military Academy, the Resistance University, and the Associated University of the Southwest (Lianda)⁹ hopes to draw some of the disparate threads together to appreciate how such elitist groups competed in the process of rebuilding a system in which, as Schneider so aptly puts it, "the state and its attendant bureaucracy were expected to be not only sources of ultimate temporal authority but also the perpetuator of ethical and aesthetic norms."¹⁰ Culture and politics were inseparable in the traditional order. Is this not also true of the alternatives on offer?

Education, as the means of perpetuating cultural norms, was primarily political; scholars were instructed in the virtues of public life.¹¹ Is this not true of the training of cadets at Whampoa and of cadres at Yanan? Dedication to active propagation of the virtues of public life was rewarded with the prospect, though not the certainty, of bureaucratic careers and political power. This tactic became a cornerstone of socio-political stability, but it also narrowed Chinese intellectual visions, and relegated intellectual and professional endeavors, other than those concerned with state and society, to secondary importance. Was liberal education at the Associated University providing an alternative?

By the late nineteenth century European expansion aroused a rude awakening among members of the ruling elite. They began to see that existing structures and contents of education, of officially defined culture, had become critical sources of Chinese weakness. Their own vested interest in the system led them to confine their advocacy of reform to the concept of "Chinese knowledge as foundation, Western knowledge for use." They were still hesitant to admit that Chinese values were not universal and could no longer be asserted as such without doing serious damage to China.

While different slogans were offered,¹² this restrictive formula of cultural defense transcended political differences. The self-strength-

eners and the constitutional reformers of the nineteenth century, the nationalists, the communists, and the liberal intellectuals of the twentieth century, all shared in this traditional commitment of making political preoccupation a prime objective for education. Each faithfully continued the traditional strategy of rewarding the loyal with prospects of official positions and political power. The establishment of the University of Beijing in 1898, of the Whampoa Military Academy in 1925, and of the Resistance University in 1936 were representative of this mainstream continuity in the maintenance of a political elite core, by training a new elite to fill the void left by the departure of the Confucian elite. Each in turn created a relatively exclusive socio-political leadership group. The Whampoa Military Academy, the Resistance University, and the universities of Beijing and Tianjin became centers of organized political activity through which student nationalism could gain expression as an organized political force.

Student Nationalism

The qualities of nationalism, if they were to be given some concrete description, need to be associated with specific time and place. During the 1924 to 1949 period, the rise of the GMD and of the CCP were related to their success in capturing the national mood and in organizing a new elite core. This short study on student nationalism and student work in China aims to highlight the process and the setting within which the GMD and the CCP captured the political mood of young students and organized them into tangible political forces in the guise of commissioned officers and political cadres. This organizational effort was described as student work.

China is large and a comprehensive treatment of the subject of student nationalism would be unwieldy, even if possible. By selecting the Whampoa Military Academy, the Resistance University, and the Associated University, this book aims to illustrate, with the student work of the GMD and of the CCP, how the two parties attempted to turn explosive and ephemeral national feelings into an organized political force between 1924 and 1949. Two of the campuses are selected to contrast the different styles of the two parties. The third is selected to show how a liberal campus community responded to the efforts of the two parties to influence and control it.

The 1924 to 1949 period saw the rise and fall of GMD power. During this period of study the GMD occupied the center stage of Chinese politics, hence fuller treatment is given to Whampoa. An

analysis of CCP practices at Yanan is included to highlight competition and to sketch an alternative and parallel approach in student work. The practices of both parties exhibited serious shortcomings, but they did succeed in capturing the energies of student nationalism momentarily, and this success was vital to the fortunes of both political parties.

Within the compound term of student nationalism, what does student stand for? Strictly speaking it identifies those actively pursuing a formal education in a school, a university, or some such formal institution. Yet such a strict definition would inhibit our understanding of student nationalism as it developed within the broader social and political context of twentieth-century China. The young men and women politicized while they were students often gave up their formal education to begin an active political life. Is their political activism beyond the confines of formal education no longer appropriately identified as student nationalism? Is there a clear demarcation line between being a student nationalist and a graduate nationalist?

Such a distinction should exist, but how is that distinction to be made? Is the distinction a question of different age groups? Should student be treated as synonymous with youth? A quantifiable approach is appropriate, as student life does come to an end eventually. According to figures cited by John Israel, in 1932 some 69 percent of Chinese college students were in the 21–25 age bracket.¹³ But this quantitative approach needs to be qualified. Should the political activism originating from a student group be regarded as having outgrown student nationalism once its practitioners were neither students nor youths? This is not a hypothetical problem, for we are faced with the reality of distinctly identifiable high points in the development of student nationalism as the “student tides” of May 4th, May 30th, December 9th, and June 4th come readily to mind. Those who left school for political action graduated from being student nationalist, but the distinguishing qualities of each “student tide” represented qualities of a specific phase of nationalism that would continue to influence those who left school. Leaders politicized by nationalism in student days may be more aware of the potential energies of student nationalism, and hence ready to organize that energy for effective political expression. Those who lead need not be students themselves, but they need to understand how nationalism motivates students.

One device adopted in this study is to identify student nationalism with specific institutions: the Whampoa Military Academy, the Resistance University, and the Southwestern Associated University. In the case of Whampoa the “student” label is extended to include its

alumni as they became the focus of a nationalist pressure group in the 1930s.

Apart from selecting representative institutions, it is also important to identify the qualitative features of specific “student tides” to trace the changing qualities of student nationalism from one phase to another, from one “generation” to the next. Although the influence of student nationalism may spill over some status and age limits, it cannot transcend the larger social political reality within which student nationalism was born. It is therefore possible to identify student nationalism of the May 4th, of the May 30th, and of the December 9th phases.

It is possible to identify a point of initiation for student nationalists. But once initiated, can the influence of student nationalism be confined by age and status? Some young leaders who grew old, Mao Zedong and Jiang Jieshi, were initiators, and continued to be leaders, of new “generations” of student nationalism as each attempted to transform the nationalist feelings of students into an organized force. So student nationalism may be defined as the nationalist feelings of students and the institutions established to turn those nationalist feelings into a tangible political force.

Student nationalism may be interpreted as a distinctive aspect of nationalism in China. It is expressive of the continuing tradition that the political elite is a politically educated elite. Student nationalism expresses a “youth” phenomenon within this elite social stratum. This is a phenomenon often observable in societies undergoing deepening crisis. As the older generation fails to solve crisis situations, the impatience of the young to try their hands at the helms of power gathers momentum.

Student nationalism in China also reflects the lingering tradition of scholar-gentry rule. Chinese student nationalism, in spite of its radical image, represents a prominent feature of continuity in Chinese socio-political culture. Direct action by student groups reasserts the claim of the politically educated that they are the real political elite.

Student nationalism is a by-product of political instability. Crises constantly put pressure upon those in authority to consolidate their support base by appealing to the younger generation, even to the point of sharing power. Their failure to solve crisis situations aggravated the scene, as the younger generation took direct action to claim power. Twentieth-century China was continually in crisis and the young were prominent in active political involvement. The scholar gentry of traditional China was now substituted by students in modern attire parading in the streets and shouting slogans. This early

entry into politics by student activists was lasting. Student nationalists did not fade from the political scene once they were no longer students. They remained highly aware of the student body as the source from which leadership material was drawn, and that it was essential for a growing political movement to maintain its momentum by retaining appeal among the young educated. Student nationalism encompassed a scene much broader than just campus and youth, though its nurturing ground was campus and youth. Its qualitative features also changed over time, and discussants need to be aware of the specific qualities of each particular "generation."

One consistent feature of student nationalists was the aim to become a *ganbu* or active functionary, more often translated as party functionary. For Sun Yatsen and Mao Zedong, the *ganbu* was ideally a professional revolutionary, one who was politically educated and who dedicated his/her life totally to a political cause. As Confucian scholars aspired to gain entry into officialdom, so modern students aspired to become active political agents, to act or *gan* in serving the national and revolutionary causes. What the activists, the *ganbu*, wish to act on was very much conditioned by the qualitative features of the particular "generation" of student nationalism into which they had been initiated. The Whampoa Military Academy and the Resistance University promoted different kinds of political strategy, their graduates were trained and organized to implement very different socio-political programs. In this way the energies of student nationalism were being harnessed to serve the interests of a party that defined socio-political norms. One of the objectives of this study is to compare and contrast the styles of the GMD and the CCP in this student work.

Why focus upon competing efforts at re-creating a political elite core? Why put stress upon the strength of tradition, of continuity, when the dominant note of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that of revolution, of discontinuity? The strength of tradition places limitations upon the pace and quality of change. Revolution is still an ongoing process, yet it is by looking at "the limits of change"¹⁴ that qualitative features of contemporary China may become more readily understood. Change and continuity are interrelated, and student nationalism, with its varying qualities over time, reflects the nature of socio-political transformation. Student nationalism is part of nationalism in general, the part that is representative of nationalist feelings of the young, politically educated, elite.

For a society as deeply rooted in cultural pretensions as China, the principal area of the interplay of tradition and change was among the cultural elite. And in times of continuing crisis the burden of

responsibility fell increasingly upon the shoulders of the upcoming generation. Student nationalism was an expression of this “youth phenomenon” within the political elite; it does not mean that only students were nationalists. The political debate was conditioned by the assumption that China was a cultural entity, that Chinese culture was more fundamental to the survival of a Chinese political identity than the trappings of traditional political forms. Conservatives and radicals alike saw cultural revival as fundamental to the rebirth of China. Conservatives looked for a classical revival, sought to defend the national essence, and accommodated change through identifying similarities in classical European and Chinese values.¹⁵ Radicals in the new culture movement sought total rejection of the past, attempted their mode of East-West synthesis through adoption of contemporary Western values of “science and democracy” and of indigenous popular cultures. Such diametrically opposed views permeated a wide spectrum, for eclecticism became the order of the day for both radical and conservative persuasions. The 1898 reformers, for example, restated what they thought were the true values of Confucianism to justify constitutional reforms; advocates of national essence were active in promoting popular anti-Manchu feelings; and revolutionaries, who brought the dynastic order down, embraced a leadership that held a cross section of such divergent views.

While the course of cultural revitalization remained uncertain, the emergence of a new political structure stood in clear contrast. The reunification of China in 1927 and 1949 were severe shocks to the outside world, causing the Japanese to define their “lifeline” and the Americans to bemoan “the loss of China.” Such expressions merely gave recognition to the resurgence of Chinese political vitality, to the rebirth of political China. The pivot of this newfound vitality, the nucleus of the rebirth of China as a political force, was its young educated elite. The younger generation of the 1920s was influenced by the cultural and ideological debates around them, they were actively immersed in the tradition of a political environment in which such debates were deemed to be central. Yet it was the pressure of deepening crisis and the impatience of the young for immediate action that set the political tone of the 1920s. In sharp contrast to the cultural debates of the 1910s, student nationalists of the 1920s were action oriented. It was not their mouthing of anti-imperialist slogans that set the scene for the decade, it was rather their activism on the streets of Shanghai, in the military campaigns of the “student army” from Whampoa, and in the organization of strike action in Hong Kong. Such actions attested the newfound political vitality of China.

While one can broadly discuss the educated elite as a distinct interest group, in political action they needed institutional bases from which to exercise their potential and influence on the national stage. With the demise of the dynastic order, the influence of the elite devolved from the bureaucracy to the surviving educational institutions: Beijing University, Qinghua University, Nankai University, and so on. These institutions, through activist groups advocating conservative and radical solutions, sought to revitalize Chinese culture and polity. These institutions provided the base from which the oncoming "student nationalists" were to appear center stage with the full status of faculty. Students such as Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun, who terminated their studies in Japan for patriotic reasons, soon became prominent professors and spearheaded the New Culture Movement. Just as they were demolishing traditional cultural values, they were sharing the belief of their protagonists that cultural revival was more fundamental than the survival of moribund political forms.

Traditionally academic institutions assisted the state in perpetuating political authority as well as ethical and aesthetic norms. The reintegration of political China and the reintegration of the Chinese cultural world, however, are of immense difference in magnitude. The May 4th "generation" took on the task of cultural revival, a task too grand for their energies to attain amid deepening crisis. Their lack of immediate success left the task of political action in the hands of the May 30th "generation," where radical talk continued, but it was political *action* that brought the fruits of reunification. The Whampoa Military Academy embodied the new trend of action-oriented student nationalism and initiated the process of political reunification through the northern expedition. Turning the gun against their communist allies at Shanghai further attested to the ascendancy of an action-oriented mood over ideological scruples. If gunning down an ally was thought to be essential to national revival, then it was to be done quickly, efficiently, and with the minimum of fuss. The December 9th Movement in Beijing continued this action-oriented trend into the 1930s. When the GMD government failed to make a credible response to Japanese incursions in north China, many students promptly trekked to Yanan to join the opposition. They trekked to Yanan not because of the attractions of communism, but in the hope of capturing the CCP for the anti-Japanese cause.

While both the nationalists and the communists succeeded in reuniting China with help from the educated young, the process of cultural revitalization championed by the May 4th "generation" remained incomplete. The New Life Movement and the Great Prole-

tarian Cultural Revolution, among other efforts, were notable failures. Political and ideological intolerance, which were used to reinforce political authority, had to tolerate cultural eclecticism if a cultural rebirth was to be delivered. Both Jiang and Mao practiced eclectic choice on their road to power, with varying degrees of success. The May 4th use of intellectual freedom as a means to revitalize China was tolerated in areas where the state, whether communist or nationalist, accepted liberalism as essential for modernization, though such residual intellectual freedom was carefully reined in by the threat of force and a nurturing of self-motivated conformity through education. The rectification process instituted by Mao in the early 1940s reinstated ideological control with hardly a whisper of dissent. Intellectual liberalism was a tool rather than an end in itself, and hence dispensable.

This work is focused on the Whampoa Military Academy, its graduates, and the political movements they associated with. The Resistance University and the Associated University of the Southwest are drawn in as active participants on the political stage, as representative of parallel and contrasting strands, paralleling and interacting with the mainstream influence of the Whampoa group between 1924 and 1949. They were participants on the same political stage and during the same historical span. Each of their seemingly different stories was part of a larger canvas interrelated one to the other. Insofar as each was concerned with reviving a strong political system and in so far as it was principally the Whampoa group that dominated the stage in the period under study, it is only fitting to put Whampoa center stage.

The Framework

In a sketch of student nationalism, the selection of samples becomes critical. The action-oriented trend of the 1920s is best appreciated by narrating the experiences of the Whampoa Military Academy, of how it was formed and how it captured the mood of the May 30th period. Chapter 2 traces how the academy was planned, and how the conscious effort of the GMD to emphasize ideological instruction failed. Chapter 3 traces the early beginning and how the cadet force galvanized under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi and how this newly organized force came to champion and symbolize the May 30th Movement. Having established the point that it was action that distinguished the Whampoa force, the story of how the National Rev-

olutionary Army (NRA) delivered the substance of national power to the GMD in the northern expedition is not pursued, for it has been treated ably elsewhere.¹⁶ Chapter 4 is a brief background chapter on how the Whampoa model, that of militarizing student nationalists, was introduced onto the campuses at Beijing. The adoption of the militarizing approach by Qinghua University in particular is used to indicate the initial momentum of the Whampoa experience among the educated in general, even in areas as yet beyond the reach of GMD military power. The momentum of militarizing the young as a means of expanding GMD influence was halted by Japanese military actions in Manchuria and north China.

Chapters 5 and 6 on the young officers movement return the focus to the Whampoa alumni, to how they believed that they could provide the leadership, the organization, and the appropriate actions to stop the Japanese and to consolidate national unification. The young officers took the initiative into their own hands in establishing an underground political network without gaining prior support from either the GMD or their teacher and patron Jiang Jieshi. Their boldness for action without prior support from Jiang was a partial cause for his maneuverings to create and nurture factional rivalry within the young officers movement. The activities of the young officers movement sustained the credibility of GMD leadership in resisting Japanese pressure, consolidated support from the regional military, and suppressed internal military-political challenges. The young officers movement did have a notable failure: it failed to spread GMD power and influence to north China in the face of Japanese pressure. The Whampoa political organization could not resolve the crisis in north China.

During the Xian incident the Whampoa political organization marshaled troops to lay siege to Xian without heeding the cautions of the GMD government. When Jiang returned to Nanjing, he was determined to weaken the structural framework of the young officers movement because that organization chose to put loyalty to the nation above loyalty to the generalissimo. The Lixingshe and the Fuxingshe were dissolved, thus depriving the young officers' movement of its central coordinating body and front organization. These actions weakened the organizational effectiveness of the Whampoa alumni grouping and split the young officers movement into a number of factional interests clustered around the GMD youth corps, the secret service headed by Dai Li, and a number of military commands. The momentum to consolidate Whampoa influence as the foundation of GMD national power was halted.

In north China Japanese pressure also induced a new surge of nationalist energies among the educated young. A significant number of them trekked to Yanan in the hope of capturing the opponents of the GMD for the anti-Japanese cause. It is at this stage that this study briefly detours from a strict chronological flow, and Chapter 7 discusses how the GMD retained some campus support in north China nonetheless. This latent support reemerged with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. Promptly campuses moved personnel and equipment southward to join the GMD-led resistance. The GMD, however, remained guarded about these once critical campuses and politely evacuated them to distant Kunming where distance would keep them safe from the Japanese and render them relatively ineffective in passing comments on the Chongqing government. In spite of this structured distance, the refugee campus at Kunming remained loyal supporters of the GMD government throughout the war years.

Chapter 8 resumes the chronological flow to discuss how the CCP coped with the influx of patriotic students into Yanan. The experiences at Yanan were remarkably similar to those of the early days at Whampoa. In spite of ideological reservations, the CCP did what it could to harness these new supporters. The Resistance University and the public school of northern Shaanxi province were the principal agents through which the CCP hastily turned its newfound supporters into an army of cadres. The CCP turned the flow of students to Yanan into an annual cadre production line of about eighteen thousand, and this force breathed a new political vitality into the decimated leadership ranks of the CCP. In contrast those who trekked south to join the GMD were placed at distant Kunming where, in the eight long years of the war, only twenty-five hundred graduates were produced out of an annual enrollment of three thousand. The attrition rate of close to 90 percent at Kunming, when contrasted with the massive flow of cadres from Yanan, told a telling tale about lost political opportunities for the GMD.

Chapter 9 is a cautionary discussion, cautioning against the assumption that the influx of students into Yanan could easily have transformed the Chinese communists into a *de facto* nationalist party. Mao devised the rectification campaign to institutionalize party ideological authority over the educated, legitimized by the very need for discipline and organization in the resistance war. Potentials for critical comments against the party was transformed by the political rituals of the rectification process into positive praise for the party. This partly explains why students and intellectuals in communist-held areas did not criticize or protest against communist policies.

Chapter 10 brings the narrative to a chronological conclusion. The campus community at Kunming was subjected to unnecessary high-handed action from GMD military commanders, former Whampoa cadets, because they suspected potential criticism from the campus community. Intimidation in the form of violence and assassinations turned the one-time loyal GMD supporters into sullen dissenters. If the campus community was not an enemy, it was no longer an enthusiastic friend. When the campus community was repatriated back to Beijing, distant from GMD power bases in central China, the suppressed anger of the campus community only waited for the occasion to give open expression.