

'The Marshal has left the stage' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (22 January 1949)

Caption: On 22 January 1949, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung paints a picture of the Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, who is forced to retreat after Chinese Communists troops take Peking.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schöningh, Franz Joseph; Schwingenstein, August ; R Herausgeber Dahlmann, Alfred; Kreyssig, Gerhard. 22.01.1949, Nr. 9; 5. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Der Marschall ging", auteur:Borchardt, Robert , p. 1.

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The Marshal has left the stage

The departure of Chiang Kai-shek signifies the loss of one of the most imposing figures from the political stage of our day. During his time as a political leader, the mixture of party hatred and support gave him ambiguity, yet it was not his character, nor he himself, but the opinion of him that was ever changing. Ever since he made his first appearance, he was considered by his fellow countrymen as the military leader of the Revolution. The early death of Sun Yat-sen enabled him rapidly to gain political influence which he used to push the revolutionary movement significantly towards the right. Since the expulsion of the Communists from the Kuomintang party, his followers and his opponents have argued bitterly about who should be appointed to take on the legacy of Sun, i.e. who should interpret his three fundamental principles as he intended. According to Chiang, Chinese Communists basically had been, and still were, serving Russian imperialism. Their subordination to a foreign power is contradictory to the principle of nationalism; that they were obliged to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat immediately is contrary to the principle of democracy; the dispute on the principle of Socialism, with its demand for fairer valuation, distribution and taxation of land, is not on the principle itself, but is about the timing of its implementation.

The Chinese Communists initially saw Chiang as a traitor to the Revolution and as the mightiest representative of the corrupt feudal system of the military dictators. However, when he put an end to that dreadful state of affairs, when he had enjoyed initial success on the road towards internal unity and consolidation, the economy started to take off and a previously unknown Chinese national feeling began to emerge, the Communists then accused him of dictatorial manipulation of power and of establishing a national dictatorship from the corrupt world of high finance. They invoked traditional xenophobia against the recruitment of foreign advisers in all areas.

However, after several centuries of internal divide, the achievement of unity and consolidation required a firm hand. Chiang was therefore never really a totalitarian dictator. That he had to fill all the key political and military positions with trustworthy men loyal to him is a matter of course in a country where politics is a game of intrigue and corruption, the traditional feature of all civil servants of the state. Not even the Communists dared to mount a serious attack on the simplicity of his private life, the purity of his intentions and his unimpeachability.

Sun Yat-sen believed that his objectives could be implemented in three stages. Rule by the revolutionary armies would be followed by political education and, lastly, constitutional government. Chiang barely managed to get beyond the first stage, since the gulf between him and the Communist opposition proved to be unbridgeable and the Japanese invasion robbed him of the gains he had made by finally eliminating them. It will always be difficult for foreigners to understand what Chiang represented in the eyes and minds of the Chinese people. Chiang's person may have been the subject of heated debates, his careful attempts to seek the proper degree of renewal may have delayed many necessary reforms, the magnitude of the task may have prevented him from taking a sufficiently hard line with corrupt officials, and familiar ties most certainly prompted him to protect the unworthy, and yet, because of his resistance against the Japanese invasion he became a folk hero of the kind that China had not seen for many a century.

Even the great powers, at least the Western ones, changed their opinion about Chiang more than he changed his own attitude towards them. Russia and World Communism were, and will remain, his irreconcilable enemies. Chiang, with his demand for equal treatment and self-determination for China, constantly prevented Japan from creating a Greater East Asia of the 'New Order'. The fact that he anticipated the inevitability of the future dispute between the great powers, their alliances and their ultimate withdrawal, was a good enough reason for him to enter the seemingly futile fight against Japan as early as 1937.

In England and America, cautious restraint was soon replaced by growing recognition for Chiang's unifying and stabilising influence. Recognition of the Nanking Government, the relocation of foreign representations there, the voluntary surrender of foreign privileges in China and, not least, their increasing participation in building the country's economy are just external signs of Anglo-American approval. With regard to the Japanese invasion, the position of the Anglo-American powers was basically limited to providing moral support. From the time of Japan's entry into the Second World War onwards, that support never reached the

degree to which Chiang was entitled because the great powers decided to give priority to the European theatre of war.

The assistance given to Chiang by the Western Powers was to be just enough to keep their enfeebled partner in the war. A great wave of pro-Communist propaganda, coming mostly from America, weakened Chiang's domestic position considerably. Despite the solemn promises made to Chiang, concessions were granted to the Russians in Manchuria at the end of the war which enabled them to give the Chinese Communists an advantage in the forthcoming struggle for internal power. The fact that continued assistance from America was repeatedly granted on condition that Chiang reached a compromise with his irreconcilable domestic enemies weakened his position yet further. Today, harsh criticism of Chiang from the Americans can only partially hide a series of their own serious political mistakes. It is remarkable how much more low key British diplomacy in China was, and how it painstakingly avoided any attempts to weaken Chiang's position; and how, because of its greater restraint, it is in a better position today to cope with what are expected to be totally different conditions.

Chiang Kai-shek will go down in the history of China as a man who gave his country hope for unity, and one day the world will see him as one of the great potential opponents of Communism who was, nonetheless, doomed to fail. The American Foreign Secretary, George Marshall, once made the scathing remark that Chiang was the most pig-headed man he had ever met. The proverb Chiang used to describe himself may help to explain this: 'Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without one.'

Robert Borchardt