I. Introduction

This year marks the 100th year anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in China when the newly established republic (1912-49) – an alien idea and ideology from the Chinese prolonged but passé political tradition which clearly modelled the body of politic after post-1789 French Revolution - still tried to find its feel on the ground. Political stability from the 1850 empire-wide social unrest on - marked by the Taiping, Nian, Muslim and Miao uprisings - was a rare commodity in China. As an unintended consequence, there was no effective control over the media or over political demonstrations. Indeed, after 1949, there was no possibility for the May Fourth to repeat itself in any part of China. In this regard, this one-off movement was not at all inevitable. This is first the foremost point we need to bear in mind when we celebrate the event one hundred year later today.

Secondly, the slogan of the May Fourth 1919 ‘Mr. Sciences and Mr. Democracy’ (*kexue yu minzhu*) represented a vulgar if not entirely flawed shorthand for the alleged secret of the Western supremacy prior to the First World War (1914-1917). To begin with the term science was clearly confined within natural sciences (military science in particular), ignoring a long line of development in social sciences in the post-Renaissance West. Democracy was superficially taken as running periodic general elections to produce the head of the state to replace China’s millennium-long system of patrimonial emperors. With the benefit of hindsight, such a slogan was both shallow and narrow, which helped very little with modernisation of China ideologically, politically, and economically in the following century.

Thirdly, there is no evidence that the movement involved masses in society. Rather, it was almost certainly conducted among a tiny group of westernised Chinese elite whose majority were mere ‘armchair revolutionaries’. As a matter of fact, after the 1919 May Fourth, whoever called the shots in China’s state-building arena were by and large neither ‘scientific’ nor ‘democratic’. Even worse, there was a clear tendency for China’s power-holders to move collectively away from in particular democracy. It is thus evident that the May Fourth Movement produced very little historic legacy. As the May Fourth slogan ‘sciences and
democracy’ was put aside and left cold, what became really fashionable in post-1919 China was outright Social Darwinism which served both republicans and communists alike.

So, the May Fourth was no more than an isolated blip in China’s recent past. The importance of the movement should not be overstated.

II. Historical background: The rise of warlords after the 1850s

The Qing state was severely weakened by the decade long empire-wide social unrest in the 1850s and 60s. A contingency and desperate measure adopted at that time was to allow provincial military leaders to finance independent forces and fight wars against armed rebels with little interference of help from the Imperial authorities in Beijing. The strategy was effective and all the rebellions were cracked down one after another. Law and order were resumed, but just. This was because the very group that defeated the empire-wide social unrest soon became de facto warlords who possessed resources and know-how to challenge their peers and authorities in Beijing. For this group, bullets always worked better than ballots. In other words, Social Darwinism is referred over democracy.

These newly emerged warlords were neither revolutionary nor nationalistic. They were power-hungry state-builders and rent-seeker. It has been estimated that in the 1920s the personal assets of China’s top military strongmen totalled 665.4 million silver yuan. The 24 richest military leaders each had personal wealth worth over 10 million silver yuan.¹ In this context, “warlordship” became very attractive in post-Qing society. It meant prestige and personal wealth. This was determined by the incentives and had little to do with ideologies, be it liberalism, populism, Marxism, fascism, democracy or dictatorship.

The best example was Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) who managed to force Puyi (1906–67; r. 1909–11), the last emperor of the moribund Qing, to abdicate in February 1912 to give way to a republic called the “Nation of the Han Chinese” (Zhonghua Minguo) in a bloodless coup in which 46 of Yuan’s army officers stationed near Beijing put forward a petition for the throne to step down. It worked. Yuan became Prime Minister in 1911, the President of the new republic in 1912–15, and the new emperor à la the French military leader-cum-state-builder Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). Was Napoleon the recognized persona for science and democracy? Of course not. Napoleon’s emperorship was a farce, and so was his copycat Yuan’s.

The Yuan’s model of personal power from bullets over ballots was soon copied by China’s new political class. Personal loyalty to the leader was ranked the paramount importance. To join Sun Yat-sen’s Party of Republicans (Guomindang, Kuomintang or Kuomingtang), the new members had to swear an oath of personal loyalty to Sun:

_I am willing to sacrifice my life and freedom to follow Mr. Sun. ... If I betray him I accept the most severe punishment._

A similar approach has been the cornerstone of recruitment by the Communist Party until today. According to the party constitution, a candidate has to cultivate a personal link (peiyang) with two formal party members who in turn have the obligation and power to test the loyalty of the candidate to their satisfaction; then the candidate is accepted as a quasi-member on probation. Over the testing and probationary periods, the two referees personally control the candidate’s public and private life. The method has been proven affective: the party grew from a few dozen to about 90 million in less than a century. The procedure was neither scientific nor democratic.

Meanwhile, members of the Chinese elite were fully aware of the causal link between the power of provinces and the rise of civil wars. Considering its political fragmentation, China was once again at the crossroads of perpetual warring states, a federation with possible peace and a dictatorship with possible peace in the 1910s and 20s. There was a movement in the early 1920s “to abandon governorship, disarm provincial forces and form a provincial federation for peace” (feidu caibing, liansheng zizhi). The movement even involved some of the most powerful military commanders of the time, Lu Yongxiang (1867–1933) of Zhejiang and Chen Jiongming (1878–1933) of Guangdong. This was a continuation of what Kang Youwei had suggested during the 1890s that the illness of China was rooted from militarised provinces which should be scrapped (feisheng). However, this school of thought often than not went back to China’s old empire for ideas and inspirations. In effect, Yuan Shikai’s short-lived monarchy

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2 Cited in Ye, _A Power that Got Lost_, p. 44.
3 Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, _Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhangcheng (Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party)_ (Beijing: People’s Press, 2007), pp. 1–2. Boots-licking is common on the candidates’ part; it is not unheard of that some highly personalised relationship lead to abuse, including sexually; see John Pomfret, _Chinese Lessons_ (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), pp. 54–5, 74, 78.
proven to be an unpopular attempt made in a wrong place and at a wrong time. But again, the movement was either neither scientific nor democratic.

It was in this context that the “1919 May Fourth Movement” (wusi yundong) surfaced in China’s politics. It aimed to convert China into another Western country. Chinese proto-communists became involved. According to their 1922 “Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party”, “We will adopt federalism to re-unite China Proper, Mongolia, Tibet and Muslim Xinjiang and establish Federal Republic of China;” “[under a Federal Republic], workers and peasants, regardless of their genders, will have unrestricted suffrage and absolute freedom of speech, publication, association, and strike.” However, this liberal approach came to a full stop among the Communists once they received routine sponsorship from the Soviet Union.

Sun Yat-sen and his Republican followers, on the other hand, strongly opposed both federalism and a democracy. Sun remained bitter about the fact that his Interim Presidency and his other powerful positions were taken away one by one in a democratic process (no matter how crude the democracy was of the time). In his essay “Revolutionary Strategy” (Geming Fanglue), Sun envisaged a future state in China as anything but a democratic federation. Sun preferred to use force to settle his dispute with his rivals. Unlike Confucian eclecticism (zhongyong) that seeks for compromises amongst all parties, the new rule was, as Mao advocated, “to treat others in a way that you hate to be treated” (ji suo buyu wushi yu ren). So, losers must be produced in a Social Darwinian struggle.

Until early 1925, Sun was far more interested in challenging the Beijing Military Government with force instead of votes. He rebelled at least three times in 1913, 1917 and 1920. Although none was successful, Sun’s propensity for violence led to the 1926–8 Republican “Northern Expedition” (beifa) in a war against the Beijing military regime. This was China’s first North-

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South civil war. The new republican leader Chiang Kai-shek famously said on the eve of the Northern Expedition that:

To put military strength and party power together, it will be not difficult for us to re-unite China.7

Here, the term “unification” was a synonym of weeding out rival forces with bullets. This set the tune for China for the rest of the twentieth century: a republic under dictatorship. There was no guarantee that such a republic was nationalistic or revolutionary.

The Republican behaviour attracted fierce critique from Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), a radical academic and a founder of the Chinese Communist Party of the time:

The nonsense of “safe-guarding China’s Temporary Constitution of 1912” [hufa] and unification [tongyi] was created by a bunch of jobless and silly politicians who are liars and troublemakers. ... It is no more than a pretext for politicians and military men to scramble for power and profit like dogs fighting for bones. ... We must use our humanistic movement to disperse the current dog-like struggle.8

Chen’s humanistic movement seems to have been a democracy with votes. But Chen was alone in his own party. In 1927, Chen was stripped off his leadership by Moscow. So, even inside his own party, there was no ballot to make a decision free from external interference conveniently in the name of “international communist movement”.

III. Social Darwinism and the rise of Republican Dictatorship, 1916–45

After Yuan Shikai’s death, China did not have a single head of the state agreed by all parties. This was a period of naked Social Darwinism. Even so, from 1916 to 27 China had de facto freedom of speech and free media. In Beijing alone, there were 572 registered newspapers and

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Provinces ran their own newspapers and journals, too. There was still genuine respect for the opinion of the intelligentsia by warlords. Restriction of the media began after 1928 while suppression of the intelligentsia started after 1949. This explains why the 1919 May Fourth Movement took place in Beijing and why it was short-lived and never became the mainstream.

In North China in the 1920s, the most influential military strongmen were undoubtedly the “Northern Modern Warlords” (beiyang junfa), grown up under Yuan Shikai’s wings. They allegedly had troop strength of 700,000. After Yuan’s death in 1916, they fragmented into three sects (the Anhui, the Zhili, and the Fengtian) and fought over resources and power. The Anhui Sect was eliminated. The remaining warlords were reshuffled under three blocs: (1) the “Northern Bloc” under Zhang Zuolin (1875–1928) taking northern Zhili and Manchuria; (2) the “Central Bloc” under Wu Peifu (1874–1939) controlling southern Zhili, Henan, Hubei and Hunan; and (3) the “Southern Bloc” under Sun Chuanfang (1885–1935) claiming parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong.

A direct result of the conflicts between warlords was the dysfunction of their own Northern Modern Military Regime (Beiyang Junzhengfu) in Beijing, which frequently changed hands. From 1912 to 1928, there were 8 presidents and 28 premiers. Four presidents lasted for merely one year. The longest term for a premier was 17 months; and the shortest, just two days.

The regime of Northern Modern Warlords was never able to impose its rule effectively across the whole of China. Regions beyond the Yangtze River where the Republicans and Communists operated were free from Beijing’s control. But the Republicans and the Communists were not united. Rather, they had separate domains. Inside the Republican Movement, there were four sects in the period 1925–28. They even ran two parallel

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12 Liu and Hu, History of Warlords, p. i.

governments formed in 1926–7: one in Wuhan, under Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), Sun Ke (Sun Yat-sen’s son, 1891–1973) and Song Ziwen (1894–1971); and the other in Nanjing under Chiang Kai-shek. During the Second World War (1940–45), the Republicans split into two governments again, one in Chongqing in China’s deep west, led by Chiang Kai-shek; and the other, the Chinese equivalent of Régime de Vichy, in Nanjing along the Lower Yangzi Reaches, headed Wang Jingwei who now openly collaborated with the Japanese invaders.

The Communists operated mainly in Jiangxi Province after 1929 until 1934. The Red Bases there had a total of 42,000 square kilometres and a population of five million.\(^\text{14}\) This was merely 0.4 percent of China’s total territory and 1.1 percent of China’s total population. However, the Communists were able to replicate their state in the Shaanxi Plateau in 1935. This was not Lenin’s “communist in one country” but “communism in one county and in one province” (Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1870-1924). Mao conceptualised the game as “building a separatist regime by military force” (wuzhuang geju).\(^\text{15}\) Factions operated amongst the Communists, too. There were frequent changes in leadership from 1929 to 1934. During its Long March retreat the Red Army finally split into two between Mao Zedong and Zhang Guotao (1897–1979) who fell off with each other. Zhang’s troops were eliminated in the end.

In addition, there were four Japan’s puppet regimes from 1931 to 1945: Manchuria, North-China Plain, Inner-Mongolia and the lower Yangtze Valley.

China was in a big mess where there was clearly absent of science and democracy. The May Fourth Movement vanished without a trace.

Among the belligerent parties, one force emerged more successfully than the others: The Citizens’ Revolutionary Army (Guomin Geming Jun) under the command of General Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975). It declared war called “Northern Expedition” (beifa) against the Northern Modern Military Regime in Beijing. It was a pure Social Darwinian showdown: Chiang deployed an overwhelming force made of three army corps at the time to take on one section of the warlords’ forces.\(^\text{16}\) Chiang finally forced Marshal Zhang Zuolin (1873–1928), the last President of the Beijing military government, to retreat to his base in Manchuria. Later,

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But the ending of the Beijing’s Military Government did not mean unification in real terms as Chiang’s new republic inherited a heavy baggage of warlordism since 1916. The alleged 2.5 million troops under the Republican banner belonged to difference power centres. In addition, Chiang had his external rival of the armed Chinese Communists. Such problems were settled by war, not by science and democracy.

The first military confrontation between Republicans broke out in early 1929 over Chiang’s biased disbarment of 800,000 troops of his Republican rivals. Chiang’s troops attacked forces loyal to Generals Li Zongren (1890–1969) and Bai Chongxi (1893–1966) in the south. This was followed by rebellion of Generals Yan Xishan (1883–1960) and Feng Yuxiang (1882–1948) who formed a new government in the north against Chiang’s in Nanjing. The two sides clashed in the second military confrontation in mid-1930 with a total of 1.1 million soldiers. Chiang won a victory with the aid of Zhang Xueliang’s army from Manchuria.

In the following period of 1930 to 1934, Chiang directed his attention towards the Communists and used the overwhelming force of 7 to 1 troop ratio to drive his enemy out of South China.17 Chiang’s army was trained and advised by the Germans, while the Communists received their tutelage from the Soviets who were evidently less efficient. In the end, the Communists were uprooted from South China. 30,000 Communist troops escaped to the northwest, known as the “Long March.” Only a third actually made it.18 Chiang was fully capable of finishing the remaining 10,000 Communists off, had Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) not effectively intervened.19 So, in 1934 the victorious Republicans finally unified China, at least in name, for the first time after Yuan Shikai. Chiang replaced Yuan and became the overlord of all warlords. His power base was the “Huangpu Sect” (huangpu xi), made of graduates from the Huangpu Military Academy. Beyond his sect, Chiang nurtured personal loyalty by money.20 But Chiang had no intention to build a democracy or to return to civilian rule.

19 New information suggests that Chiang deliberately let the Red Army go in order to get his son Chiang Ching-kuo back from Stalin’s custody; see Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao, the Unknown Story* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), pp. 142, 161, 174, 197.
20 Chiang’s own army corps customarily received twice as much as the others did; see Liu, *Military History*, p. 26.
Meanwhile, the future of the Communists appeared bleak. As a loser in the civil war with the Republicans, the Communist Movement may well have been doomed well before 1940, that is if without the external shock of the Japanese invasion to deviate Chiang’s attention. Chiang would kick himself for letting the Communists go. Because soon the Communists under Mao who emerged as the new leader during the Long March was able challenge Chiang. In 1941, Mao personally commanded 500,000 soldiers.\(^{21}\) Chiang had 3.2 million troops under the Republican banner. His Central Army Corp (zhongyang jun) of 600,000 were most loyal.\(^{22}\) In 1945, the gap narrowed to 0.7 million (Mao’s) versus 1.2 million (Chiang’s).\(^{23}\) By 1948, the two sides had become evenly matched in both manpower and weapons (see Table 1). By then, Mao personally controlled troops several times more than Chiang did. This time it was Chiang’s party that was doomed.

Table 1. Manpower and Weapons: Republicans vs. Communists

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Communists</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troops</td>
<td>3,700,000</td>
<td>320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifles</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannons</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>600</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Communists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troops</td>
<td>2,180,000</td>
<td>2,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifles</td>
<td>980,000</td>
<td>970,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannons</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>2,280</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Troops</th>
<th>Rifles</th>
<th>Cannons</th>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troops</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifles</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>606</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannons</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>380</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^{22}\) Cui, *Changes in Political and Social Structures*, vol. 3, pp. 1396–7.

However, a Communist victory under Mao’s leadership was never inevitable. In as late as mid-1946, Chiang’s state claimed three-quarters of China’s territory, three-quarters of China’s towns and cities (1,545 in all), and two-thirds of China’s population (339 million). Militarily, Chiang was still able to deliver some punches, as demonstrated by Chiang’s Siping Campaign in South Manchuria in 1946 against Lin Biao’s Communist Army (Lin Biao, 1907–71), which pushed Lin 360 kilometres all the way back to his last stronghold Harbin in the northern corner of Manchuria to face total elimination.

At this crucial moment, Stalin interfered again for the sake of the Soviets’ own interest in Manchuria. The American Mediator George C. Marshall also played a part in curbing the Republican troops from attacking Harbin. Barely two years later, did Lin Biao sweep not only Manchuria but also all the way to China’s southernmost tip, taking big cities one after another along the way. In the process, Chiang lost 1.5 million troops, many of whom changed sides and joined the winning People’s Liberation Army. This time it was the Communists – the twice losers in 1927 and 1934 – that came out triumphantly.

Apart from Stalinism, the Communist success can be attributed to its rural dependency on logistical support. Their strategy, called “encircling the cities from the countryside” (nongchun baowei chengshi), was patented by Zeng Guofan (1811–72) the late Qing military genius who managed to defeat the Taipings. Mao himself confessed that

> Amongst all the recent figures in history, I only admire Zeng Wezheng [Zeng Guofan] in that he did such a perfect job to eliminate Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing [of the Taipings].

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The dream of building a modern and stable state with lasting peace in China was complicated by the external shock. Japan was by far the greatest threat to China’s national security and territorial integrity from the 1890s onwards. Taking every opportunity, Japan invaded China five times in 1894–5, 1900–1, 1904–5, 1928–31, and 1937–45, more than all the attacks from other modern powers put together (1839–40, 1856–60, 1883–5 and 1900–1). Hence, Japan violated China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in every decade until 1945. As a basic historical fact, no single Chinese soldier has ever set a foot on Japan’s soil so far. This says a lot about the Sino-Japanese relationship.

The threat from Japan altered China’s internal balance and momentum. Between 1931 and 1945, China was carved up into three geopolitical blocks: (1) the “Republican Territory” (guotong qu) administrated by Chiang’s Republican government in Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan in China’s deep west, (2) the “Communist Territory” (gongdang qu) under Mao Zedong in two border regions (Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia and Sshanxi-Chahar-Hebei) in Northwest China, and (3) the areas under four Japanese puppet regimes (riwei qu). Make no mistake, the regions marked as the “Japan-controlled Territory” were all taken from the Republicans. It included China’s most advanced provinces regarding workforce, outputs, railway lines and sea ports. In peacetime, this part of China produced about three-fourth of the country’s total GDP. The “Republican Territory” was essentially a well-off paddy farming region with modest industrial infrastructure, but plenty of food and manpower. The “Communist Territory” was located in marginal farming regions with hardly any industry (see Table 2). One thing was however clear: Japan did not invade and conquer China to promote science and democracy. Rather, the Japanese invasion and conquest exponentially promoted and reinforced Social Darwinism in China.

Table 2. China’s Fragmentation (%), 1944

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29 Invasions of Beijing in 1900, Lushun in 1904–5, Qingdao in 1919, Manchuria in 1928 (together with the assassination of ex-President Zhang Zuolin), Liaoning, Inner Mongolia and Hebei in 1933, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and other major cities in 1937.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area in China’s total</th>
<th>Cities in China’s total</th>
<th>China’s GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican Territory</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan-controlled Territory</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Territory</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: * Frontier regions controlled by local strongmen: Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai and Tibet.

However, Japan stood very little chance to sustain a war on East Asian Mainland for four reasons. Firstly, Japan was not an advanced military power. The myth of Japanese invincibility was broken within two months after the Japanese invasion began. Japan’s colonisation of Manchuria met stiff resistance of Chinese guerrillas from the very beginning until 1945. There were the celebrated “Changsha Coup” in January 1942 when the Chinese forces destroyed 50,000 invading Japanese, the “Hengyang Defence” in 1944 which denied the Japanese advance and killed 20,000 Japanese, the “West Yunnan Campaign” which cost the Japanese Army 21,000 troops also in 1944, and then the “Zhijiang Finale” in 1945 when 70,000 Japanese troops were thoroughly defeated by 20,000 Chinese soldiers.31 After that the backbone of the Japanese Army was broken.

Secondly, the Japanese seriously underestimated China’s military capacity. By 1930 China had been systematically militarised. In 1937, China possessed more than twice as many rifles and cannons and three times as many troops and machine guns and as the Japanese invaders did.32 If the Communists are included, China’s superiority should be 4 to 1 regarding troops and 3 to 1 in terms of weapons. From mid-1941 to mid-1942, the Chinese defence forces fired a total of 210 million bullets on the invading Japanese.33 In 1942, after five years of hard fighting, the Chinese resistance forces still had one million rifles, 8,200 trench mortars, 1,000

31 Chen et al., Counter-Japanese Invasion, pp. 311, 367, 370, 384,
33 Liu, Military History, p. 160.
anti-tank guns and 250 million rounds of bullets.\textsuperscript{34} This was before any sizeable aid was made available to China from the United States.

Japan also underestimated the Chinese economic strength. Although the invaders destroyed China’s coastal industries and crops of 600 million \textit{mu} (60 percent of China’s total),\textsuperscript{35} China’s rural economic base remained largely intact.\textsuperscript{36} Before any large foreign aid, the Chinese had fought for six years. They could do another 6 or 12 years.

Thirdly, Japan’s small resource base was incapable of supporting a prolonged war on any scale. Even at the start of the war Japan already ran short of just about everything: manpower, food, metal, fuel and technology. Japan needed at least two million troops to take over entire China and another four million to sustain its rule.\textsuperscript{37} These estimates are based on the assumption that there would be no casualty on the Japanese side. With Chinese well organised resistance, the required number has to be multiplied. But the maximum troops Japan deployed in China Proper were no more than 600,000.\textsuperscript{38} In 1945 at the time of their surrender, Japan had only one million troops in China Proper and Manchuria put together.\textsuperscript{39} Japan simply did not stand a chance.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{36} Liu and Wang, \textit{Market and Economic Growth}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{37} In the 1910s and the 1920s a warlord needed a private army of 200,000 troops to sustain his operation; see Liu and Hu, \textit{History of Warlords}, pp. 116, 124–7, 161–5.
\textsuperscript{38} Liu, \textit{Military History}, p. 205. Vladimirov’s figure for 1944 is 470,000–570,000, see Vladimirov, \textit{Diaries}, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{40} Liu Jingzhong, \textit{Huabei Riwei Zhengquan Yanjiu (The Japanese Puppet Regime in North China)} (Beijing: People’s Press, 2007).
V. Social Darwinism and the rise of Communist Dictatorship, 1935–76

Dictatorship was also actively pursued by Chiang’s arch-rival Mao Zedong (1893–1976) who moved up the ranks within the Chinese Communist Party during the Long March. Internal purges played a very important role: the “1930–1 AB League Purge” (suqing AB-tuan), and the “1941–5 Yan-an Rectification Purge against Trotskyites” (also called “Yan-an Terror,” Yan-an zhengfeng). The rule was all but simple: the survival of the fittest. In August 1945, Japan surrendered. Mao was ready to take on Chiang, and vice versa, for the last time. It was a war between two military dictators. This was due to the absence of a democracy that was able to embrace two military-territorial states.

To be fair, the United States intervened. President Truman saw the Republican government as a potential democracy-maker, pointing out that

*The present National Government of China is a ‘one-party government’ ... peace, unity and democratic reform in China will be furthered if the basis of this Government is broadened to include other political elements in the country.*

To that end, Truman sent a high-powered envoy General George C. Marshall as a peace broker on a two-year mission. According to Marshall’s assessment, Chiang’s party had already

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41 “The AB League” stood for “Anti-Bolshevik League.” Pre-dating Stalin’s notorious “Great Purge” of the 1930s, the purge was orchestrated by Mao. Wang Ming was also involved. It wrecked the Red Twentieth Army (hong er-shi jun), one of the best fighting forces under the command of the Communist Party; see Dai Xiangqing and Luo Huilan, *AB-Tuan Yu Futian Shibian (The AB League and the Futian Purge)* (Zhengzhou: Henan People’s Press, 1994); Jiangxi Archives (ed.), *Zhongyang Ge ming Genjudi Shiliao Xuanbian (Selected Materials for the Central Base of Communist Revolution)* (Nanchang: Jiangxi People’s Press, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 631–50; Gao Hua, “Su AB-Tuan Shijiande Lishi Kaocha” (Re- assessing the Purge against the AB League), *21 Shiji (21st Century)* 54/4 (1999): 60–8; Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, pp. 95–7, 99, 100, 113, 116, 129. The total death toll of the AB League Purge was 100,000; see Li Rui, *Li Rui Tan Mao Zedong (Li Rui’s Memoir on Mao Zedong)* (Hong Kong: Time International Publishing Co., 2005), p. 2. See also Di and Mai, *Military Aide*, pp. 103–22.

42 This was a purge against the alleged sympathisers of Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) who fell out with Joseph Stalin in a lasting power struggle in the Soviet politics.


embraced a wider social spectrum with more members than any other parties in China and thus
was more capable of leading the country towards democracy-cum-peace. This view seems to
have resonated with Stalin who stated that

*Those who think that the Communists would swallow the Guomindang [Republicans] are
wrong. The Guomindang certainly is a broader and a more influential party than the
Communists.*

A Truman-Marshall proposal was duly made to form a coalition government to accommodate
all main parties, armed forces and administrations in China.

But the Chinese Communists had other ideas. On the very second day after the Japanese
surrender, the gloves came off. Mao’s right-hand man General Zhu De (1886–1976) openly
declared that all of the ex-Japanese territories were fair game for his army. Meanwhile, Mao
cabled Stalin a message in November 1947 that in the final victory of his revolution, all other
parties had to step down from China’s political scene. Mao’s position was consistent with his
policy papers, especially his 1940 “On the New Democratic Doctrine” (*Xin Minzhuzhuyi Lun*)

Meanwhile, Western powers – the United States, Britain and France – turned down Chiang’s
desperate call for external interference. This gave Mao the free hand to cross the Yangzi River
to take over the rest of the mainland territory. The Republicans retreated to Taiwan. By then,
Chiang’s party members shrunk by 99.3 percent and his territory by 99.6 percent from where
they were in 1946 when China won the victory over Japan. Mao monopolised the state power
on the mainland.

After his military triumph in 1949, Mao and his party-state had even less incentives to adopt
the 1919 May Fourth call for science and democracy. Liberal minded intellectuals were

49 Cui, *Changes in Political and Social Structures*, vol. 3, p. 1512.
systematically purges again and again to pave the way for Mao’s autocratic control of the economy and society in the People’s Republic. It all began in the “1950–3 Suppression of Anti-revolutionaries” (zhenfan, sufan) when 12 million were investigated; 4.6 million accused; and 710,000 executed.\(^{50}\) Then, there was the “1951–2 Three-Anti and Five-Anti Movement” (sanfan wufan) purged another 1.2 million officials,\(^{51}\) which was followed by “1955 Purge of the Hu Feng Anti-Party Clique” (hufeng fandang jituan), affecting a few thousand intellectuals, serving as Mao’s warning shot against anyone “scientific or democratic”.\(^{52}\) The “1957 Anti-Rightist Movement” (fanyou) persecuted over half a million (or 10 percent of the educated population of Mainland China).\(^{53}\) The Gulag model was copied by Mao.\(^{54}\) Still paranoid and unsatisfied, Mao turned his gun to his party and bureaucracy in the “1959 Lushan Purge against the Party Right-Wingers” (lushan huiyi), and the “1964 Four Cleansings” (siqing),\(^{55}\) until he turned the whole society upside down in the decade-long “1966–76 Great Proletarian Cultural


\(^{51}\) Against embezzlement, waste, and bureaucracy among officials; and against bribery of the government officials, tax evasion, stealing from the state, cutting corners in state-contracted works, and spying on state economic secret by the private sector. For the data, see Liao Luyan, “Guanyu Jieshu Wufan Yundong He Chuli Yiliu Wentide Baogao” (Report on the Ending of the Five-Anti Movement and Its Residual Issues), 17 October, 1952 (Beijing: Central Archives); An Ziwen, “Guanyu Jieshu Sanfan Yundong He Chuli Yiliu Wentide Baogao” (Report on the Ending of the Three-Anti Movement and Its Residual Issues), 18 October, 1952 (Beijing: Central Archives).

\(^{52}\) “The 1955 Hu Feng Pure” was a total fabrication from start to finish, a sinister dry run for much wider purges. It was the first time when the Maoist secret police practised their muscles. It set up the model for the following purges. It victimised 2,100 well-educated intellectuals of whom majority were communist party members and communist supporter. None had their freedom back until 1980 (if they were still alive). See Li Hui, *Hu Feng Jituan Yuan-a Shimo* (A History of the Fabrication of the “Hu Feng Clique”) (Wuhan: Hubei People’s Press, 2003); Sheng Guofan, *Wo Suo Qinlide Hu Feng An, Faguan Wang Wenzheng Koushu (My Personal Experience of the Hu Feng Clique, Memoir of Judge Wang Wenzheng)* (Beijing: Chinese Communist Party History Press, 2007).


\(^{54}\) For a case called “The Narrow Valley” (Jiabian Gou) in the Gobi Desert in remote Gansu, see survivals’ accounts: He Fengming, *Jingli – Wode 1957 Nian (The Year 1957 When A Disaster Struck on Me)* (Lanzhou: Dunhuang Literature and Art Press, 2001); Yang Xianhui, *Jiabian Gou Jishi (Diary in the Narrow Valley)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 2003).

\(^{55}\) Li, *Memoir on Mao*, pp. 147–8.
Revolution” (wuchan jieji wenhua dageming), designed to wipe out all intellectuals including, persecuting over 100 million citizens (9.4% of China’s total population of 1976).\(^{56}\)

Meanwhile, to demonstrate how unscientific Mao was, in his “Great Leap Forward” in 1958-61 Mao aimed to surpass Britain and catch up with the United States in coal and iron output (chao ying gan mei). So, he declared in 1958 that

\[
To\ surpass\ Britain\ will\ not\ take\ 15\ years\ or\ even\ seven\ years.\ It\ will\ only\ take\ us\ two\ to\ three\ years,\ very\ likely\ just\ two.\ The\ main\ item\ is\ steel.\ As\ long\ as\ we\ reach\ 25\ million\ tons\ [of\ steel]\ in\ 1959,\ we\ surpass\ Britain.\^{57}
\]

And,

\[
If\ we\ can\ get\ 60\ million\ tons\ [of\ steel]\ in\ 1962,\ it\ won’t\ be\ hard\ to\ surpass\ the\ United\ States.\^{58}
\]

The aim was to push China’s iron and steel output from 5.35 million tons in 1957 to 10.7 million tons in 1959, and then to 18 million tons in 1960. Accordingly, China’s output of coal was to increase from 113 million tons (1957), to 335 million tons (1959), and then to 397 million tons (1960).\(^{59}\) To achieve such goals 90 million peasants were mobilised,\(^{60}\) twice the size of China’s entire existing industrial workforce of the time (45.5 million in 1959). To assume that 80 percent of Chinese were rural and one-third of the rural population were able-bodied workers, about 50 percent of the rural worker force was asked to produce iron and steel. In the process, one million backyard furnaces were hastily built, some of which were converted from brick kilns and limekilns.\(^{61}\) A great proportion of the metal output was recycled. It was reported by Wang Hong, an official of the State Planning Committee:

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\(^{57}\) Song, *Rise and Fall*, vol. 2, p. 409.


\(^{59}\) Xue, *Memoir*, p. 269.

\(^{60}\) Song, *Rise and Fall*, vol. 2, pp. 406, 409.

I was in Nanjing to inspect the Iron and Steel Drive. I visited the University of Nanjing and Nanjing Industrial College where students melted down their iron bed frames and university iron fences into piles of slag with no value. The universities had to buy new beds for students. What a double waste.\textsuperscript{62}

Even so, the frenzy continued unchecked. In 1959, a total of 7.2 million metric tons of slag were produced which cost the state treasury 10 percent of its revenue to finance the waste (four billion yuan out of its 38.8 billion yuan revenue).\textsuperscript{63} It was documented that pound for pound, the rural production cost 5–6 times more coal than modern furnaces. Still, the back practice continued:

*Because Chairman Mao promoted backyard furnaces, many regions support them by cutting the coal for modern furnaces which in turn suffered losses in output.*\textsuperscript{64}

Such a growth was non-sustained. A mountain of hastily rolled out slag did nothing for the economy. China’s iron and steel in 1962 dropped back to 6.67 million tons, a decline of over 60 percent from 1961; and China’s coal dropped back to 220 million tons, a decline of 45 percent from 1961.\textsuperscript{65} Meanwhile, in 1962 China’s industrial workforce was cut back by 8.5 million (17 percent less than 1961) and China’s urban population by 20 million (15 percent less than 1961).\textsuperscript{66} In other words, China was back to where the leap started. The growth farce cost cost China 30 billion yuan,\textsuperscript{67} equivalent to 44 percent of China’s GDP in 1952. Worse still, in 1961-62, China suffered the largest peace-time man-made famine in human history: as many as 30–40 million mainlanders paid the ultimate price for Mao’s “experiment.”\textsuperscript{68} Regions that

\textsuperscript{62} Wang Hong, “Yueru Gongchang Zhuyide Beizhuan Shijian” (Sad Practice of Communism), *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (History of Chinese) 1 (2006): 24. After he reported it to his superior, Wang was labelled as “rightist opportunist,” which practically ended his career.

\textsuperscript{63} Song, *Rise and Fall*, vol. 2, p. 424.

\textsuperscript{64} Xue, *Memoir*, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 269.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 275.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 280.

\textsuperscript{68} Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghost, China’s Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996), ch. 18; Jin Hui, “Sannian Ziyanzaihai Beiwanglu” (Memorandum on the Alleged Three Years of Natural Disasters, 1959–62), *Shehui*
were hit the hardest in the famine, such as Henan, Anhui and Sichuan, were backyard furnaces were most numerous. Meanwhile, food shortage infected the whole country. It was documented that

People suffered malnutrition. Oedema cases were reported in a great many places. 69

Why and how food ran out so quickly, considering that China was fully capable of feeding its population until 1956? The answer is that the violation of the natural law in food production: According to China’s official data, (1) in 1958, 10 percent of crops were simply abandoned in the fields; (2) in 1959, labour input in farming decreased by 35 percent; 70 and 10 percent of farmland (173.9 million mu) lay idle. 71

But the lesson was not learnt. A few years later, during the Cultural Revolution, the official propaganda went as follows: 72

We prefer socialist weeds to capitalist crops in our fields;
We prefer socialist delay to capitalist punctuality in our train services;
We prefer socialist low speed growth to capitalist high speed growth in our economy;
We prefer socialist poverty to capitalist affluence.

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69 Xue, Memoir, p. 280.
And, the most ridiculous of all, “we only need a political balance sheet, not an economic one;”\textsuperscript{73} “as long as we keep firm grip on class struggle, it doesn’t matter if our fields lay completely idle;”\textsuperscript{74} and “political struggle overrules everything else.”\textsuperscript{75}

The damage of the Cultural Revolution to the industrial sector was severe. China’s workforce was far less disciplined than before and the central planning broke down. Factories produced more shoddy products than before because of Mao’s policy of “freeing workers from control, supervision and suppression” (guan ka ya) in work places.\textsuperscript{76} Almost immediately, industrial investment returns dropped by 20 percent and industrial labour productivity dropped by about 40 percent.\textsuperscript{77} It was recorded that

\begin{quote}
The first two years of grave social turmoil [i.e. 1967 and 1968] severely damaged industrial production. Huge resources were wasted. China’s capacity of economic construction was weakened. ... Factories produced shoddy goods. Efficiency decreased by the day.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
A great many state-owned factories only produced defective goods and rejects but still passed them on to the state procurement department to fulfil their tax and profit obligations. These quantities were but nominal.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

As a result, China’s exports, mainly canned foods, were blacklisted by importing countries for poor quality, which reduced China’s already meagre foreign trade.\textsuperscript{80} There were also complains about the poor quality of China-made weapons.\textsuperscript{81}

Moreover, a large number of factories and mines simply closed down. From January 1967 on, factory workers were agitated by Mao to take over factories and local governments; all the rules and regulations were abandoned as bourgeoisie dictatorship; most technicians and

\textsuperscript{73} Ling, \textit{No More Hesitation}, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{74} Zhang and Su, \textit{Decade of Cultural Revolution}, vol. 1, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 423.
\textsuperscript{76} Yu, \textit{China’s Socialist Modernization}, p. 614.
\textsuperscript{77} Zhang and Su, \textit{Decade of Cultural Revolution}, vol. 2, p. 444.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 436.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 397.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 1074–5.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 511.
managers were suspended as “whitesmiths;” all production command system was derailed; large numbers of workers deserted factories and joined in street mobs.\textsuperscript{82} This applied to the most prestigious iron and steel industry whose output nosedived.\textsuperscript{83} Even the People’s Liberation Army stopped routine training for “political studies.” In 1968, each air force pilot on average flew only 24 hours for the whole year.\textsuperscript{84} The situation has been described in the post-Maoist official view as

\textit{The ten years of “cultural revolution” threw Chinese society into chaos and caused further grave damage to the country’s economy. Production was pitted against “revolution” and anyone who gave active leadership in production was criticized. At one time almost all state-run enterprises stopped production.}\textsuperscript{85}

\textit{China’s industrial production stagnated and even backslid during the “Cultural Revolution.” … Factories owned by the “whole people” [i.e. the state] sustained the heaviest damage.}\textsuperscript{86}

Mao died in 1976 which consequently ended his Cultural Revolution. With hindsight Hu Qiaomu (1912–92), a senior member of the Communist think-tank, pointed out that

\textit{If we had had a democracy, personal dictatorship and its related terrible mistakes world have never occurred. The blunder of the 1958 Great Leap Forward would have been stopped, as the campaign obviously had no popular support from 1959 to 1960. The 1966 Cultural Revolution had no genuine support in the Communist Party or from any social stratum despite short-lived fanaticism [of the Red Guards].}\textsuperscript{87}

Undoubtedly, China has paid very heavy prices for not opting for “science and democracy”.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 404, 407, 408, 43; vol. 2, pp. 747–8.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., vol. 2, p. 1162.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 505.
\textsuperscript{85} Yu, \textit{China’s Socialist Modernization}, p. 576. Note: The Gang of Four, headed by Mao’s own wife Jiang Qing, were Mao’s diehard supporters and instrumental to Mao’s Cultural Revolution.
\textsuperscript{87} Zhang and Su, \textit{Decade of Cultural Revolution}, vol. 1, p. 13.
VI. Final remarks

Even with the very intention, this paper fails to establish any detective link between the 1919 May Fourth Movement and modernisation in China in the past 100 years. It is amply evident that Social Darwinism prevailed in Mainland China instead across all periods from the rise of warlords after the 1850s until rise of Communist Dictatorship, 1935–76.

However, there were nuances: From the 1850s to 1945, state-builders and power-holders ignored or shunned “science and democracy”. But after 1949, Mao irrationally attacked head on “science and democracy” with gigantic social costs for Mainland China.

In such a context, the 1919 May Fourth Movement has so far had no real impact on Mainland China’s growth and development. If so, the movement was naïve and non-consequential in history.