Review Essay: Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front, by Tetsuya Kataoka

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Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front, by Tetsuya Kataoka

Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front. **By Tetsuya Kataoka. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. xiii, 326 pp. Maps, tables, index.**

This is an ambitious book in which the author attempts to answer the question. "How did the Chinese communist revolution succeed?" Professor Kataoka's analysis is limited to the period 1935-1943, the period in which, he feels, the Communist Party's winning strategy was formulated and applied and final victory was nearly assured. His major conclusion is that the winning strategy combined war of resistance against Japan with full scale revolutionary war. In stating this position he takes issue with official Chinese Communist Party (CCP) history and with what he asserts is the prevailing view of Western scholars. Official CCP history of the period, which is based on the document "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party" (April 1944, adopted at the Seventh Party Congress, August, 1945), maintains that the party line laid down at the Sixth Party Congress in 1928 was basically correct in its emphasis on work in rural areas, the Red Army, the soviets and severe land revolution. The document creates the impression that Mao Ze-dong's rural strategy was the key to success Kataoka's objection to this thesis is that it does not recognize the paramount importance of the war with Japan, especially its influence on the cities and the formation of the second united front with the Guomindang [Kuomintang]

In his introduction, Kataoka specifically takes issue with Benjamin Schwartz *(Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao)* and Chalmers Johnson *(Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power)* He argues that Schwartz is incorrect in his assessment that CCP strategy did not change basically from the second civil war period (Jiangxi Soviet) to the resistance

war period. On the contrary, Kataoka suggests, the CCP radically altered its policy after the Zunyi Conference in 1935 to include a united front from above and did not just reaffirm the Maoist line against left and right deviations Johnson's contribution, according to Kataoka, is his recognition of a radical shift in orientation in 1936 and 1937, but like Schwartz and others he confined his attention to the rural areas and virtually ignored the united front. Other scholars, unnamed and treated in the aggregate in Kataoka's account, are said to have helped to sustain the view that the revolution was created entirely in the countryside on the basis of self-reliance. This supposition, Kataoka says, is connected with the assumption—also fostered by the Communist Party—that CCP activities during the war of resistance against Japan did not include revolution-making. In other words, the "prevailing view" that the author sets out to correct is that the communist revolution was exclusively rural, and was made during the civil war periods, not during the Yanan [Yenan] period, 1937-1945. Kataoka's ostensible corrective thesis is that the cities played a major role in communist strategy and that communist activities during the war of resistance were indeed revolutionary.

In trying thus to establish his thesis, Kataoka overstates his claims vis-a-vis other authors. Schwartz, Johnson, Mark Selden *(The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China)* and certainly Lyman Van Slyke *(Enemies and Friends The United Front in Chinese Communist History)* grant the importance of the united front to communist strategy, and none of them would deny the revolutionary nature of the Yanan period. What sets Kataoka apart from everyone but Johnson is his categorical assertion that the war against Japan was the most important condition for communist victory in the revolution and, consequently, that revolution was a "discretionary and contingent event." "In the sense that the revolution in China could not succeed without the war," he asserts, "one can conclude that the revolution itself was a contingent event" (p. 311). Kataoka does not prove this thesis, nor is it possible to do so, but he does analyze the development of CCP strategy and the intraparty struggles that attended it, and makes a strong case for the importance of the war and the united front to communist victory. He then departs from Johnson and goes beyond other authors in asserting the importance of class warfare, particularly as manifest during the Yanan period in the expropriation of the rich and the redistribution of land to poor peasants to gain their allegiance

There are, then, two foci of this book One encompasses the struggle of the communist leadership to adapt itself to the war with Japan, and the other is concerned with peasant revolution in rural areas controlled by the communist forces It was a combination of the two—resistance and revolution—that brought victory

To clarify the relationship between resistance and revolution, Kataoka has devised a rather elaborate analytical paradigm which pits the cities against the countryside He wants to show the role of the cities in the equation of communist victory The paradigm is fundamentally specious because, actually, he does not talk about the cities at all The term is simply shorthand for the Guomindang and its bourgeois supporters, i e , "forces generated in the cities " For decades these supporters had been motivated by nationalism. Driving out Japan, therefore, was very important to them in the late 1930s and led to a reversal of Chiang Kai-shek's [Jiang Jie-shi's] dictum, "internal unity before resistance to outside aggressors." The function of the war, then, was to neutralize politically the "forces generated in the cities" which, in 1934, had been more powerful than forces generated in the countryside by Mao and other leaders of the rural soviets Neutralization gave communist forces a chance to consolidate their power and expand behind Japanese lines where they were able to build new revolutionary bases. It was crucial, therefore, to keep the Guomindang in the war, and to maintain the united front until the CCP had occupied enough territory and built enough power to challenge the Guomindang successfully in another civil war. That point was reached in about 1943, the author thinks

The argument is plausible, even if unproven Nevertheless, Kataoka's analytical vehicle leads him into the error of drawing too strict a dichotomy between urban and rural areas. He interprets the communist historiographical analysis of China as a semifeudal, semicolonial country in strictly geographical terms (semifeudal = rural, semicolonial = urban), which ignores the interpenetration that had taken place by the 1930s of both the urban and rural and the colonial and feudal aspects of the Chinese political economy Fortunately the paradigm, once elaborated, is largely ignored except insofar as one is inclined to accept the equation of united front with cities.

One of the author's principal arguments is that the strategy that combined resistance and revolution in proper proportion was not developed full-blown, nor was it conceived entirely by Mao Ze-dong It was the product of debate and compromise within party councils. Mao

Ze-dong, on the one hand, was concerned primarily with furthering the rural revolution, his adversaries, on the other hand, the internationalists led by Wang Ming, were concerned primarily with maintaining the united front by not alienating the Guomindang The strategy that eventually took form was worked out at a series of conferences. At Maoergai in June 1935 Mao apparently objected to the idea of a ceasefire with the Guomindang and a united front from above. Wang Ming, writing from Moscow, disagreed. Not only was he promoting the current line of the USSR and the Comintern, he was also acting in accordance with his long-term lack of faith in the revolutionary potential of the peasants. He wanted to return the revolution to the cities and this could only be done through temporary cooperation with the Guomindang. Mao answered Wang in December 1935 at the party conference at Wayaobao. He accepted the idea of a united front, but still referred to Chiang Kai-shek as the "ringleader of traitors," and insisted on a militant revolutionary line which would run parallel with united front policy. This indeed was to be the policy followed throughout the war years. During most of 1936, Mao did not want to abandon land reform. The Red Army moved into Shanxi province from February through May and carried out violent land confiscation and redistribution. Mao insisted that the Guomindang was a party of the landlord class. By July 1936, however, Wang Ming's line seems to have prevailed. Kataoka speculates that at that time Mao was on the defensive in the party The highest priority of party policy was to force the Guomindang into a war with Japan, and Mao seems to have agreed to the united front because it could be used to protect the revolution as it advanced toward socialism. The CCP Resolution of September 1936 was a tactical retreat from Wayaobao. It confirmed the CCP offer of a united front with the Guomindang, but interpretation of the meaning of united front would continue to divide the CCP.

The lines of division were apparent by August 25, 1937 at the CCP's Lozhuan Conference The united front was very fragile even after the war with Japan was officially declared in July. For months the CCP feared that the Guomindang might capitulate to Japan, particularly if pushed by aggressive CCP expansion The internationalists, while agreeing with Mao on independence for the CCP within the united front, felt that the CCP should clear its decisions and policies with the Guomindang and observe restrictions placed on it, particularly with regard to the war zones within which the Guomindang tried to limit CCP operations

The issues of expansion and the amount of antifeudal struggle to be pursued during the war took the form of a debate over military strategy at the Lozhuan Conference Zhu De, Peng De-huai, and Liu Bo-cheng seem to have sided with Zhang Guo-tao against Mao in calling for "mobile guerrilla warfare" rather than "independent guerrilla warfare" in the mountains. Mobile warfare would have included large-scale actions against the Japanese in coordination with Guomindang troops. It assumed considerable dependence on the Guomindang for military supplies and thus reduced CCP initiative. Mao wanted to disengage from regular warfare and use available troops to infiltrate Japanese lines and start building rural bases. After a fierce debate, he prevailed Three years later the strategy of regular warfare would be tried in the Hundred Regiments offensive under Peng De-huai's leadership and would result, as Mao had predicted, in disaster for the CCP. The Japanese response temporarily cost the CCP half of the territory and about half of the population on its tax registers (about fifty million people).

Wang Ming returned to China from Moscow in late 1937 and personally led the opposition to Mao's rural strategy. Kataoka states that he gambled his career in pushing for an all out defense of Wuhan, which he likened to the defense of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. He felt that it would cement the united front and return the CCP to the cities. The Comintern backed him as did Zhou En-lai and former Party Secretary Qin Bang-xian (Bo gu). Mao wrote prolifically in defense of his position in 1938. As it turned out, Chiang Kai-shek aided Mao in his intraparty struggle by deciding to "trade space for time" and evacuate the Wuhan area in October 1938.

At the Sixth Party Plenum in Yanan, September 28 through November 6, 1938 Mao's Lozhuan military line was accepted, but several concessions were made to Wang Ming and the internationalists. The principal document to come out of the plenum was "On the New Stage," which Kataoka thinks was written jointly by Wang and Mao, though his evidence is purely circumstantial It conceded Guomindang initiative and promised cooperation after the war. It is in light of these concessions that Kataoka stresses the radical nature of "On New Democracy" written in late 1939 and published in January 1940 That essay has generally been regarded as moderate, but Kataoka asserts that it was very radical in the context of intraparty struggle, so much so that it was unacceptable to party leadership as a whole and had to be published in a journal as Mao's personal opinion In it Mao strikes a blow at the internationalists and the Comintern by emphasizing that New Democracy is "democracy of the

Chinese type, a new and special type." He also reverses "On the New Stage" by denying Guomindang initiative—the proletariat leads the New Democratic revolution—and says nothing about cooperation with the Guomindang after the war On the contrary he suggests an antagonistic relationship in his statement that "We are now living at a time when the 'principle of going up into the hills' applies."

Mao pushed his policy of going up into the hills to the limit at a time when that policy seemed most dangerous to Wang Ming and his faction In 1940 Wang Jing-wei formed his puppet government in Nanjing [Nanking], and the Guomindang in Chong-qing [Chungking] was exploring possibilities for a peaceful solution to the war that would have left communist forces isolated and vulnerable. The Hundred Regiments Battle in August 1940 had led to serious CCP reverses and had not deterred Guomindang-Japanese talks, if that was its purpose In this situation the internationalists counseled restraint and caution, but Mao urged continued infiltration of Japanese-held areas—but not those held by the Guomindang. This was a particularly risky policy in North Jiangsu, an area that the Guomindang wanted as a link between North and South. The Guomindang did finally take action against communist-led troops, wiping out much of the New Fourth Army Kataoka's analysis of the New Fourth Army Incident again runs counter to the generally accepted interpretation of events. He regards the outcome of the incident as a definitive victory for Mao's strategy and the end of the influence of the internationalists This is because the incident remained basically local. The Guomindang did not pursue their attack into North Jiangsu where communist forces had established bases against specific Guomindang orders The Guomindang had indicated that it would tolerate peasant revolution during the war Meanwhile, talks with Japan broke down and soon the United States came into the war, precluding Guomindang withdrawal. The united front had been consolidated on Mao's terms His strategy announced at Wayaobao was vindicated, and the CCP would continue to build bases that would be too strong for the Guomindang to overthrow in the civil war

Kataoka's interpretation of these events is by no means entirely new, but he has supplied much detail that I have not seen elsewhere, and he has exceeded other scholars in drawing well-defined lines between Mao and his opponents. To do so, he has relied heavily on conjecture and inference that some scholars will undoubtedly find unscholarly On the other hand, he is careful to label his inferences as such. The result is a plausible, if controversial, analysis of intraparty debates, and a rather convincing case for the importance of the united front to CCP victory

Turning to the other part of the equation for CCP victory, revolution, Kataoka's main contention is that the Yanan period was considerably more revolutionary than many people have thought, particularly in regard to land reform. Under united front provisions, the Communist Party agreed to stop the confiscation and redistribution of land that had characterized their previous efforts to transform society What they did, in fact, was to use different methods to achieve the same ends Through forced "loans" and a steeply progressive "rational burden" tax system that remained in effect in communist areas until 1941, communist forces carried out "confiscation by installment." The land policy was fully revolutionary. Landlords and rich peasants had to sell land to meet their taxes. Those who resisted risked being classed as traitors or bandits and executed. Kataoka asserts that "traitor weeding," which eliminated 1,402 people in Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region in three years, for instance, had a definite class character. In many CCP areas taxes seem to have been determined democractically—the majority decided who owed what on a tax scale of one to twenty. Invariably the poor taxed the rich. Often the great majority of the populace paid no tax at all. In 1941 the "rational burden" system was replaced, Kataoka says, by a "unified progressive tax" that was somewhat less arbitrary and put a greater percentage of the populace on the tax roles, but the relatively rich still carried the major tax burden, and many poor peasants continued to move into the middle peasant category as their material status improved

Kataoka's revelations are very important for understanding communist success, but his research is somewhat slipshod. Carl Dorris, who recently studied the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region, states that the "unified progressive tax" was adopted in only three of perhaps nineteen or so border regions and base areas and that it was no less arbitrary than the "rational burden " There are other mistakes and omissions due, in part, to a lack of sufficiently thorough research. Dorris, for instance, does a far more thorough job of researching tax and rent policies in Jin-Cha-Ji Nevertheless, the conclusion that would seem clearly to emerge from Kataoka's taxation study is that the Communist Party won over the peasants, not by patriotic appeal or ideological education, but by what they did for them, or enabled them to do for themselves, materially Ironically, having made a strong case for peasant support of the CCP on the basis of self-interest, Kataoka goes to great lengths to deny its importance Drawing on Philip Kuhn's study, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864,* he argues that peasant mobilization was based on the "peculiar social and political organization

of China's vast hinterland" the spontaneous mobilization of the peasants into paramilitary organizations to defend their villages when threatened was "a natural reflex by tradition" in China. The Communist Party was able to mobilize local self-defense groups that sprang up in the wake of the Japanese invasion because of their own superior military power and because of their simple decency in relations with the peasants. Until communist bases were fully consolidated, however, the loyalty of local guerrilla troops was contingent on the defense of their villages. Tens of thousands of these *irregular* troops (as distinct from regular, Eighth Route Army troops) deserted at various times during the war when communist forces were forced by the Japanese to retreat. Eventually, however, through "thoroughly modern organizational procedures," the Communist Party was able to tie together the various local cells to form a powerful military force.

This focus on the Communist Party's organizational ability enables the author to ignore the revolutionary content of the communist movement. Peasant mobilization was due to manipulation from above rather than voluntary support from below. Kataoka supports Ramon Myers' contention that chronic rural poverty played only a passive role in peasant mobilization. It did not, he says, precondition or predispose the peasants to rise up in response to a precipitating event. On the contrary, massive poverty and deprivation were consequences of war and revolution rather than a precondition. In taking this position, the author takes sides in a hot controversy that divides scholars of modern China. Unfortunately, he adds no new data to prove his case, indeed, in his discussion of tax policies and land confiscation he provides considerable data that lead me to draw conclusions opposite to his.

Kataoka may be correct that he need not go beyond 1943 in seeking the basic reasons for communist success, but that thesis remains questionable. Perhaps the major components of victory were there—a strong army, strong base areas, land reform and attendant social transformation, Guomindang indecision and weakness—but the relationship between communist leaders and the masses is largely ignored in Kataoka's study. I would argue that the mass-line work style of the Communist Party, which was not fully articulated and put into effect until the production campaign in late 1943 and 1944, was a major factor in the revolutionary movement and in maintaining peasant loyalty in the subsequent battle with the Guomindang It might also be argued that the restoration of full-scale, overt class warfare and land reform from below in

the late 1940s, when the peasants took a more active role in transforming society, was essential to CCP victory

On the other hand, Kataoka would probably maintain that civil war land reform policies were but a variation of a well established principle, and that the mass-line, whatever its revolutionary significance, had little to do with the actual seizure of power which was his main concern These are issues that require further research and will continue to be debated by students of the Chinese communist movement Meanwhile, *Resistance and Revolution* makes a contribution to the literature on that topic

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