

JIANG TINGFU: "REVOLUTION AND ABSOLUTISM"

The Nationalist system of one-party rule under a strong leader found a defender rather than a critic in another Western-trained (Oberlin College and Columbia University) scholar, Jiang Tingfu (1895–1965). A college professor and an authority on political and diplomatic history at the time he wrote this essay, Jiang became increasingly active as a Nationalist official, as ambassador to the USSR, and later as the Nationalists' permanent representative on the United Nations Security Council (known there as T. F. Tsiang).

Mr. Hu Hanmin has recently said that not a single good thing has been done by the government during the past two years. His statement is both overdrawn and inadequate. It is overdrawn because the government did do some good things, but they were of no avail and probably did not outweigh the bad things it had done. The statement is inadequate because the situation described applies not only to the government in the past two years but to the government in the past twenty years. Actually, while China did not have a very good government in the past twenty years, there was no extremely evil government either. Extremely good or extremely bad governments existed at the local level, but not at the national. For even if the central government had intended to do something good, it did not have the capacity to do anything very good. Similarly, even if it had intended to do something bad, it did not have the capacity to do anything bad. This is generally true with the past twenty years during which groups and individuals of various kinds, including Yuan Shikai and Chiang Kai-shek, assumed control of the government. In my opinion, even northern warlords such as Yuan Shikai, Duan Qirui, Wu Peifu, and Zhang Zuolin were all desirous of doing good, but no good results come out of them. This is because all their energy was spent in dealing with their political enemies. When engaged in dealing with their enemies, they had to sacrifice reconstruction to maintain an army and resort to any dubious means in order to win. The problem is

therefore not that of personality but that of circumstances. Given the circumstances, no one could achieve good results. The basic situation of China may be summarized in one sentence: Without a unified political power, there can be no good government. . . .

Viewed from the standpoint of history, this phenomenon is quite natural, and no nation is an exception to it. Advanced Western countries such as England, France, and Russia resembled China in their early stages of development when there was only internal order but not revolution. In England the Wars of the Roses raged in the fifteenth century, but no results were achieved. It was toward the end of the fifteenth century that Henry VII unified England and began a century of absolutism under the name of the Tudor dynasty. During these hundred years the British people had a good rest and rehabilitation; as a result, the national state was formed. The seventeenth century saw the culmination of political conflicts in a genuine revolution. Historians are agreed that had there been no Tudor autocracy in the sixteenth century there could not have been any revolution in the seventeenth century. . . . [Jiang goes on to cite the Bourbons and the French Revolution, the Romanovs and the Russian Revolution as illustrations of the same point.]

The present situation in China is similar to that of England before the Tudor absolutism, or that of France before the Bourbon absolutism, or that of Russia before the Romanov absolutism. The Chinese, too, can have only internal disturbance but not genuine revolution. Although we had several thousand years of absolute government, unfortunately our absolute monarchs, because of environmental peculiarities, did not fulfill their historic duty. The heritage left to the republic by the Manchu dynasty was too poor to be revolutionary capital. In the first place, our state is still a dynastic state, not a national one. Chinese citizens are generally loyal to individuals, families, or localities rather than to the state. Second, our absolute monarchs did not leave us a class that could serve as the nucleus of a new regime. In fact, the historic task of the Chinese monarchies was to destroy all the classes and institutions outside the royal family that could possibly become the center of political power. As a result, when the royal family was overthrown, the nation became a "heap of loose sand." Third, under the absolutist regime our material civilization lagged far behind. Consequently, when the foreigners took advantage of our trouble after the outbreak of the revolution, we were unable to offer any effective resistance.

In sum, the political history of all countries is divided into two phases: first, the building of a state, and second, the promotion of national welfare by means of the state. Since we have not completed the first phase, it is idle to talk of the second. As a Western saying goes, "The better is often the enemy of the good." The so-called revolution of China today is a great obstacle to our national reconstruction. The Chinese people should adopt an objective attitude and view the civil war as a historical process, just as physicians study physiology. We should foster the unifying force, because it is the vital power of our state organ-

ism. We should eliminate the anti-unification force, because it is the virus in our state organism. Our present problem is the existence of our state, not what type of state we should have.

[“Kaiming yu zhuanzhi,” pp. 2–5 —CT]