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I-23

[23]

TEARS ACROSS THE FACE OF CHINA

Each winter the Old Weaver, who had once been a soldier in the great Taiping Army, came to the home of the Chu family in Szechuan Province, and each winter ^{the chief called} Little Puppy waited impatiently for the old man to set up his ^{long} narrow loom, ^{to} ~~adjust~~ ^{tinker with} the spindles of ^{coarse} cotton thread spun by the women of the Chu household, fill the shuttles, and begin to weave.

Half a century later, when this same ^{child} Little Puppy, had become known to the world as General Chu Teh, commander-in-chief of the Chinese Communist armies, it was the Old Weaver who emerged from his ^{tenning} ~~myriad~~ memories as one of the chief influences in his life. He ^{remembered} ~~recalled how~~ the old man's hands, ^{long, ~~long~~ long and brown, which} flew like light, but above all he remembered his tales of the Taiping armies and its great chieftain, Shih Ta-kai, known as the I-Wang, or Assistant Prince, to the Taiping mystic and prophet, Hung Hsiu-chuan. It was Shih Ta-kai of whom the Old Weaver always spoke, for Shih was the most beloved folk hero of the Chinese people.

It was the end of the nineteenth century when little Chu Teh listened to the old man's tales, and once again the Chinese people were restless under the decadent Manchu Dynasty which had lost war after war with the western powers. In conservative intellectual circles there was talk of a constitutional monarchy, but among the people there was talk of the achievements of the Taipings.

Less than fifty years had fled since the Taipings had first arisen, and official historians had always called them bandits and blood-thirsty men who had left China a desert. Every stone upturned in the

war of the Manchus, the Chinese gentry, and foreigners, to exterminate them had been laid at their door. When some old story-teller tried to pawn off such tales the people hooted him down. A vast folk literature secretly percolated through the villages, and though ~~the Taipings~~ it admitted that the Taiping armies had been destroyed, yet the peasants would not admit that Shih Ta-kai had been sliced to death in Chengtu; for to admit this would have meant the abandonment of hope.

The Old Weaver was one of the Taiping veterans who kept Shih Ta-kai's memory green. Coming as he did from the big cities, he was also the bearer of new ideas of the age, which he often compared with the ferment that swept through China which the Taipings lived and fought. Little Chu Teh grew up on such tales and with the passage of time he had absorbed through them a general history of the great Taiping rebellion which rocked China for fifteen years in the middle nineteenth century.

Western historians write more objectively of the Taipings today than they did in the past--for the Taipings are dead and buried, but their speculations about the ~~the~~ Chinese Communist armies of this age are similar to the writings of their predecessors ~~of the past~~ of the past. Modern historians now tell this story of the Taipings:

The ink on the unjust treaties forced on China following the British Opium War of 1839-42 had hardly dried before, as the old Chinese saying goes, thorns and brambles began to grow in the footprints of armies. Famine spread throughout the south, and peasants took to the highways, begging, robbing, eating off the big gentry families, and dying. Unemployed artisans joined their ranks and pirates, defeated by British warships, carried their weapons to shore and joined them.

Shortly before this, in 1847 to be exact, an obscure school teacher, Hung Hsiu-chuan, who had failed in the State Examinations, one

day appeared at the American Baptist Mission in Canton where he talked with the missionary, the Rev. Isaachar Roberts, saying that he had seen the sacred books of the Christians and wished instruction. The pastor enrolled him as a catechumen, but without waiting to be ordained Hung left for his native village, Hwahsien, not far away.

It is known that Hung spread the faith among his family and friends and that he, his brother, and ~~an~~ a neighbor, baptized each other and began to spread the teachings of Jesus. And Hung claimed to have had visions, in one of which he ascended to Heaven where God led him to the parapet of the universe, showed him the evils of the world below, and bade him go forth and spread the true faith.

Hung's neighbor soon left for the neighboring Province of Kwangsi where he founded the first congregation of "God Worshippers" on Thistle Mount, ~~and soon~~ ^{where} Hung, the mystic and prophet, ^{soon} joined him. Before long there were ~~flourishing~~ flourishing congregations of God Worshippers throughout Kwangsi and Kwangtung Provinces. Poor peasants, particularly the oppressed Hakka and Miao tribes, flocked to the new faith of brotherly love. ~~But~~ ^A number of men of wealth and education also ~~soon~~ became convinced and, like their early Christian prototypes, sold all their worldly possessions and gave the proceeds to the common funds.

Among these men of wealth and education was one by name Yang Hsui-ching, and another the famous Shih Ta-kai, both of whom later emerged as men of military genius who sent the alien Manchus hurtling toward their doom--until the western Christian nations, Britain and America, took the field against them.

To protect their congregations from Manchu troops and bandits, the God Worshippers founded volunteer militia, which soon were forced to fight in regular military formations for their lives, and out of these struggles the great Taiping Army rapidly developed and ~~Shih Ta-kai in particular~~

the very name of Shih Ta-kai caused Manchu armies and the landed Chinese gentry to tremble.

Before five years had passed the Taiping Rebellion swept through all south China and Yang Hsiu-ching mapped his strategy against Peking which he soon thereafter put into ~~action~~ effect until it seemed that the Manchu Dynasty ~~was doomed. That~~ would perish. Nanking on the Yangtze, at the gateway of foreign-controlled Shanghai, became the ~~Taiiping~~ capital of the Taiping T'ien Kuo, or "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace", presided over by Hung Hsiu-chuan the T'ien Wang, or Heavenly Prince. Shih Ta-kai bore the title of I-Wang, or Assistant ^{Pr}ince, and Yang Hsiu-ching the "Eastern Prince", and three other Taiping military commanders ~~also~~ similar titles.

For fifteen years the Christian Protestant Taipings held out against the combined armies of the Manchus, the Chinese landed gentry, and the British-American mock-heroic ~~army~~ force known as the "Ever Victorious Army" of which the first commander was the American adventurer Frederick Ward. When Ward fell in action his place was taken by the British Army officer, Charles Gordon, or "Chinese" Gordon. The commander-in-chief of these "allied" armies was Tseng Kuo-fan, a Chinese landlord-official who had organized the first Army of the landed gentry against the Taipings. The "Ever Victorious Army" was offered the loot of any city it captured, and since its ranks were made up of mercenary riff-raff from Shanghai it fought fiercely with the modern western weapons supplied it by foreign merchants and bankers of Shanghai.

Had it not been for the second ~~and~~ Opium War in 1858-60, the Taipings would certainly have overthrown the Manchu Dynasty and established a Chinese brand of Christian Empire. ~~But~~ ^{But} after the Manchus signed a peace treaty agreeing to pay new heavy indemnities, open new cities to foreign business, and to legalize British opium imports, the Taipings were dommed. For the Taipings were unyielding patriots,

who branded the Manchus as fiends who kow-towed to foreign enemies; and, above all, the Taipings passed laws making opium-smoking or the opium traffic capital crimes. Such men, the most progressive Chinese of the age, could never be depended ^{on} to sell their country to foreign powers.

That the Taipings were Christians, though not of the western orthodoxy, was well known to the Christian powers which went to the aid of the corrupt and decadent heathen Manchu Dynasty, and western missionaries invented plenty of arguments to support foreign merchants and envoys against them. Hung, the mystic and prophet, was called a fake, an imposter and a blasphemer who had no right to baptize people or preach the gospel, for he had not even been ordained. Furthermore, his baptismal rites were utterly false.

But it was the Taiping practices about private property which aroused the greatest fury of foreigners and ~~the~~ the Chinese gentry. For these rebels trod in the footsteps of every great Chinese peasant revolution before them, dividing the great landed estates among the tillers. Even as iniquitous was their violation of the ancient Chinese code of the subjection of women. The Taipings banned foot-binding, allowed widows to remarry, and permitted women to sit in the official State Examinations, qualifying them to hold official positions. Women regiments, under women officers, fought in the Taiping Army, had separate encampments, ~~from the men~~ and, like the men, were sworn to a life of chastity.

Each morning and evening the Taiping armies gathered to recite the "Ten Heavenly Laws", or Ten Commandments, and were pledged to rigidly abstain from lewd language, adultery, robbery, gambling, wine drinking, smoking, opium smoking, witchcraft, sorcery, and fortune-telling. Adultery, stealing, murder, and opium smoking were all

capital offenses, and it was said by the people that no Taiping took as much as a strand of thread from the people. No Taiping could have a servant or ride in a sedan chair on the backs of poor men, and until they captured horses from their enemies none but the highest officers or the sick could ride a horse. They struck deadly blows at all the ancient evils in Chinese society and though some of their leaders were later corrupted by foreign and Manchu intrigue, the ranks remained true to their original principles.

That many men of learning with knowledge of modern thought served in the Taiping Government was proved by the adoption of the western solar calendar to replace the ancient lunar calendar with its code of lucky and unlucky stars. These men worked out ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ past Chinese historical dates, to conform with the solar system, with scientific exactitude so that even today one can consult the Taiping calendar if he wishes to compare ~~previous~~ Chinese dates with our own.

Rooted as they were in the soil and history of their own country, the Taipings retained the best ethical teachings of Confucius and Buddhism. Hostile missionaries wrote that though Hung's voice was Christian, his words were Confucian, and as proof referred to the retention of the family hierarchy and filial piety. But the Taipings could see little difference between Confucian filial piety and the Commandment enjoining men to "honor ~~the~~ father and mother"; nor do many of the teachings of Buddhism or Christianity differ so very much. It is doubtful if, in the eyes of God, there is any difference at all.

But after the second Opium War, America and Britain, with some little help from the French, threw all their weight behind the heathen Manchus. British gunboats and troops, and foreign arms and ammunition, poured into China in defence of the Manchus who were pledged to do as the foreign powers demanded. And by 1864 the Taiping capital at Nanking fell to ~~Tseng Kuo-fan's~~ Tseng Kuo-fan's "allied" armies, among

~~which was~~ ~~from~~ the foreign ~~superstitious~~ mercenary ~~armies~~ "Every Victorious Army".
 Taipings were hunted from house to house until one hundred thousand of
 them were slain, captured Taiping officers were put to ^{the} sword, and
 the body of Hung the mystic and prophet, who had previously committed
 suicide, was dug up and thrown to the dogs. In the city of Anking,
 Tseng Kuo-fan's armies slaughtered twenty thousand Taipings.

Official Chinese historians, as late as 1944, admitted these
 atrocities, but added that "the times called for harsh measures". Thus
 spoke the Japanese in Nanking also in 1937, and thus spoke foreigners and
 official Chinese about the slaughter of Chinese revolutionaries who,
 from 1927 to the present day, fought under the command of General Chu Teh,
 once the child called Little Puppy who absorbed ~~xxx~~ ^{Taiping} tales of glory
 from the Old Weaver at the turn of the 19th century.

Tseng Kuo-fan became the hero of upper-class China and the
 foreign powers, and in later decades Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek held
 him up to the Chinese people as the "princely ideal" worthy of emulation.
 For the issues today remain ~~these~~ ^{the same as those in} (the days of the Taipings, and as
 late as 1944 a Chinese Communist writer, Chen Pai-ta, passionately attacked
 Generalissimo Chiang's defence of Tseng Kuo-fan in these words:

"Does it matter that Tseng Kuo-fan could write elegant
 compositions and letters, or public anthologies of famous poets?
 First he was honored by the Manchus and foreign imperialists, and that
 is enough for us!"

To the little peasant child, Chu Teh, sitting at the feet of
 the Old Weaver, the great Taiping commander, Shih Ta-kai, embodied the
 greatest of human virtues. Shih had not been captured in Nanking, but
 had long since rebelled against the growing corruption in the Taiping
 capital and led his army across the face of south China toward distant
 Szechuen where he hoped to establish a government that preserved all
 that the Taipings ^{had} set out to accomplish.

Shih Ta-kai led the first "Long March" in Chinese history
 and, and seventy-five years, when he was past fifty, General Chu Teh

and his armies followed in ~~the~~^{his} footsteps, passing over the same routes, almost step by step. Not only did they do this, but they were conscious of the fact that they were doing so, that they were ~~destined~~^{destined} to complete the "first great Chinese democratic revolution" ~~in~~ which Shih Ta-kai had failed to accomplish. Both armies called up the peasants, artisans, and poor intellectuals, both confiscated and divided landed estates among the peasants, ^{and} both caused the landed gentry reactionaries to tremble and the foreigners to snarl like ~~wolves~~ wolves. When both armies occupied a place, the people clung to their saddles and pleaded that they remain, but both armies urged the people to remain true ~~and~~ until they had conquered and could return.

There was a difference: instead of Christianity, General Chu Teh's armies were Marxians. ~~Like Shih Ta-kai~~ They had many more men of education in their ranks, and they had captured ~~the~~ western weapons from their enemies whereas Shih Ta-kai's army had only spears, swords, and bows and arrows against the modern muskets and cannon of the Manchus. But no Chinese Communist has yet ~~equalled~~ surpassed Shih Ta-kai's literary ability, an ability which official scholars were forced to admit ranked with the best in the Empire. In letters and poems Shih appealed to Tseng Kuo-fan to desert the Manchus, the enemies of the Chinese people, the writer of this account ~~and in his account~~ once listened to a Chinese Communist with flashing eyes and trembling voice repeat one of Shih's most famous poems:

My whip swings.
 In sorrowing triumph
 I come to the central plains
 Moved neither by enmity nor gratitude.
 Heaven is deaf to all judgment or feeling,
 How then can I rescue the people with my bare hands?
 Three armies grip the reigns,
 Pitying our exhausted horses.
 Ten thousand climb the mountains
 Like sick monkeys.
 Though millions have suffered
 My aim is still unachieved.
 The face of all China
 Is streaked with tears.

Reaching the southern Szechuen border, Shih divided his army into three columns, two for diversionary movements on the Chengtu plain, while he led the third in person through northern Yunnan, across the River of Golden Sands, and in January, 1863, reached the wild and turbulent river, the Ta Tu Ho, with its overhanging cliffs and towering mountains that jut out from the Tibetan plateau. Chengtu, the capital, the goal of his march, lay to the northeast.

But a powerful Imperial Army, commanded by Viceroy Lo Ping-chang of Szechuen, armed with western muskets and cannon, awaited the Taipings on the farther bank. The Viceroy had also armed and bribed the aboriginal Lolo tribes to cut off the food supply of the Taipings from the rear. It was at this same spot that General Chu Teh's Red Army of Workers and Peasants stood seventy-five years later. Generalissimo's Chiang had also sent agents to bribe and arm the Lolos, but the Red Army had sent others to make agreements with them. The author of these lines/^{later}saw young Lolos who had joined the Red Army at that time.

Repeatedly the Taipings tried to cross the Ta Tu Ho. Five thousand once embarked on rafts, holding their shields before them, while their red-uniformed, red-tanned officers stood boldly before them. Red was the color of the Christian Taipings and of the Chinese Communists alike, for throughout Asia red is the color of life and joy. The Taipings rowed into the withering fire of the enemy army, ~~but~~ not one of them escaped alive.

When all the horses and mules had been eaten and the surviving Taipings faced death or surrender, the Ta Tu river was clogged with the ~~many~~ bodies of those who preferred death. Viceroy Lo Ping-chang's Memoirs gloat over the cunning tactics which he then adopted. Great banners, promising life and liberty to all Taipings who surrendered, were strung up, and on June 13, 1863, he writes, Shih Ta-kai surrendered. Four thousand Taipings who were nearly ~~gone~~^{dead} from hunger, or who would be ~~taken~~.

captured by the Lolo tribes as slaves, were freed, but two thousand of the able-bodied were herded into the near-by town of Ta-shu-pu where, on June 18th, at a rocket signal, the Manchu armies fell upon them and slaughtered them to the last man.

Viceroy's Lo's Memoirs read:

"On the 13th he (Shih Ta-kai) came into camp leading his child, four years of age, by the hand, and gave himself up with his chiefs and followers. Shih Ta-kai and three others were conveyed to Chengtu on the 25th and put to death by the slicing process; the child was reserved until the age prescribed by regulations for the treatment of such cases."

Thus again, as at Nanking and Anking, "the Heart of the Taipings was torn out by the roots and the Emperor's heart was gratified to the utmost."

Old story-tellers who related this ~~xxxx~~ version of Shih Ta-kai's fate hastened to add that so great was the injustice that the ghosts of the Taiping slain still haunt the Ta Tu Ho ferry crossing and the village of Ta-shu-pu, and there on dark nights they wail in sorrow. The voice of Prince Shih the I-Wang can be ~~xxxx~~ heard above them, warning the Chinese people to "look to our rivers and mountains" which, as everyone knows, means China.

That tale, declared the Old Weaver, was a fiendish Tartar lie, for it was not Shih Ta-kai who was killed in Chengtu. This came about because Shih had once rescued an educated girl whose family had all been killed by the ~~Tartars~~, and in gratitude she offered to become his concubine. He adopted her as ~~xxxx~~ his Fourth Girl, or daughter, instead, and, since she was a scholar, she copied his letters and documents for him. Now this Fourth Girl once noticed a Taiping officer who so closely resembled her adopted father that she asked that ~~xxxxxgiven~~ she be given him in marriage, and this was done.

When Shih Ta-kai sought to save his army by surrendering, the Fourth Girl sent her husband, who closely resembled him, to surrender in his stead, and it was this man who ~~surrendered and who~~ was later sliced

to death in Chengtu. Shih himself shaved his head, donned the saffron robes of a Buddhist priest, and escaped.

This tale brought comfort to the hearts of the peasants, but still another admitted Shih's death while keeping his glory green.

"Standing beyond the Ta Tu Ho," ran this tale, "Prince Shih said to his soldiers: 'If we fight we die, and if we do not fight we die. So it is better to fight.' Thus they tried to fight, but were slain by western muskets and cannon. It was then that Prince Shih wandered alone into a rocky field, where he knelt and pleaded for the last time ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ with the Christian God. God made no sign, but when Shih arose he saw a poor peasant chopping the rocky field with a heavy mattock, and going up to him he said:

"I am ~~Shih~~ Shih Ta-kai. God has deserted me. There is a heavy price on my head and he who delivers it to the Tartar fiends will be poor no longer. Take my sword, cut off my head, and deliver it to the fiends."

"The peasant kowtowed in respect and love, saying he could not do that thing, but Shih lifted him up and convinced him, and the peasant did as he was bid."

This tale also, declared the Old Weaver to little Chu Teh, was not true, for Shih Ta-kai had escaped as a Buddhist ~~priest~~ ^{priest}, and had since been seen in many parts of China, once in a secret peasant gathering in his native Kwangsi Province, once in Chekiang when Manchu troops attacked revolting peasants. When the fiends heard and saw Shih Ta-kai, they fled in terror.

There was also the time when the travelling merchant, Mr. Li, came to a Min River crossing in Szechuen and asked the boatman to ferry him across. Then an old man with a long white beard and carrying a paper umbrella appeared and ~~asked~~ ^{asked} to be taken also. Before they cast off the old man, whose face was filled with dignity and sorrow, said:

"A storm is coming up and your boat will be sunk. Do not go now."

The boatman looked in surprise at the skies and saw ~~that~~ dark clouds rolling up where none had been before. The three wayfarers went to a wine restaurant, but the old man pushed the wine ~~cup~~ cup from him, saying that wine was an evil. Then he looked at his two companions and said:

"The wind and moon are still here,
But where are our rivers and mountains."

Hearing these rebellious words and glancing at the untouched wine cup, Mr. Li asked the venerable old man his honorable name, and the old man answered:

"I am no longer of this world, so why should I tell you. Should I speak the truth, you would be afraid."

When the storm had passed the boatman ferried his passengers safely across the river, and the old man walked away without a word. Mr. Li picked up the umbrella which he had left behind, and on the handle saw the the name, Shih the I-Wang, and the name of a Buddhist Temple. And he and the boatman trembled.

Little Chu Teh also trembled at this story and looked about him at the mountains and listened to the distant flowing river.

Few Chinese will admit that Shih Ta-kai was sliced to death in Chengtu, for the Chinese people need comfort. One American missionary by name of Dr. W. A. P. Martin, who served as adviser to Manchu Viceroy ~~of the time~~ ^{during the rebellion,} later wrote that thought he had "often advocated the dismemberment of China", yet "how different would have been the future of China had the allied powers backed up the Tai-pings against the Manchus!"

After the Taipings were broken and slain, the Englishman A. L. Lindsay, who had ^{been} ~~served as~~ adviser on the staff of Yang, the "Eastern Prince"--the only foreigner who championed this first Chinese democratic revolution--accused the western nations of the "blackest treason to their faith".

Decades passed and China sank deeper into poverty and subjection, but never were the Taipings forgotten by the ruling classes or the common people. In 1935, seventy-five years after Shih Ta-kai and his army perished at the Ta Tu Ho, General Chu Teh, commander-in-chief ^{of the Chinese Red Army}, stood with his staff and a hundred thousand men at the same river crossing where ~~they had lowered~~ the Taipings lowered their flags.

This moment seemed like the turning of the wheel of history, ~~like~~ the repetition of a tragic drama. For the social and international alignments were almost identical. On the far banks of the Ta Tu river ~~now~~ stood an army whose commander-in-chief, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, sought to emulate Tseng Kuo-fan, the landlord-official, and ^{who,} like Tseng, ~~Generalissimo Chiang~~ had the wild support of the landed gentry, ~~and~~ the foreign powers and foreign missionaries. The epithets hurled against the army of the revolutionary people, led by General Chu Teh, were identical with those used against the Taipings: they were "bandits" and "blood-thirsty murderers," men who distributed the landed estates among the peasants, who emancipated women and struck deadly blows at all the evils in Chinese society--including opium which they also made a capital crime.

As missionaries once debated: "Are the Taipings Christians?" and answered "No!" so did foreigners challenge the Chinese Communist contention that they were completing the Chinese democratic revolution which the Taipings began. Men no longer fought about religion. Social ideas were now open and unafraid, and men fought and died for them. And the foreign powers that had gone to the rescue of the heathen Manchus, provided their successor, Chiang Kai-shek, with money, arms and ammunition. And Chiang's army on the far banks of the Ta Tu Ho boasted loudly that the Red Army would perish in the same manner and on the same spot ~~where~~ as the Taipings.

The Red Army scoffed, saying that history did not repeat itself. True, they had copied many tactics of the Taipings; their rules of conduct were much like the Taipings, their regiments bore similar or identical names, their men were also volunteers and officers ^{were} promoted from the ranks on merit. Like the Taipings, they made opium smoking or opium trafficking a crime and, like the Taipings they imparted knowledge to their troops. But the conscript armies of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek facing them across the river were illiterate and uninformed, their officers and men were opium smokers, --and not even the Manchu armies that faced Shih Ta-kai had been opium smokers.

General Chu Teh did not copy Shih Ta-kai's efforts to cross the Ta Tu Ho. Instead of rowing directly into enemy fire with terrifying shouts, one column of his army crossed the river down stream under cover of darkness and came up in the enemy rear, even into the fatal village of Ta-shu-pu where the Manchus had slaughtered two thousand disarmed Taiping soldiers. In the confusion of the Red Army attack, General Chu and his staff and the rest of his army crossed the river, losing but seventeen men in the crossing.

When they had stepped ashore, General Chu paused and / listened, recalling the old tales that on this spot one could hear the ghostly voices of the Taiping dead wailing through the long nights. He ^{listened} but heard only the sound of battle. Yet something made him listen intently still, and that same something caused him to lift his hand in salute to no one in particular. Later, when the dead had been buried he stood before his army and he and they bared their heads and stood in silence for the traditional three minutes, thus honoring their own ~~and the~~ and the ~~and the~~ dead of their revolutionary predecessors, the Taipings who had perished on this spot.