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Disarming the Allies of Imperialism: The State, Agitation, and Manipulation during China's Nationalist Revolution, 1922-1949 (Book Review)

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Murdock, Michael G: *Disarming the Allies of Imperialism: The State, Agitation, and Manipulation during China's Nationalist Revolution, 1922-1949*, Cornell East Asian Series 119. (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2006), xiv + 348pp., pbk \$31.00. ISBN-1-885445-31-8.

This book reduces the extraordinarily complicated history of the Guomindang's (GMD) rise to power in the 1920s to a contest between two impulses that evolved together within the revolutionary movement. The party employed what Michael Murdock labels "dual-prong" tactics to undermine its opponents. One prong was mass organization and anti-imperialist/anti-warlord agitation. When unleashed it could be difficult to control, but it could also be used to maneuver party opponents into positions of weakness relative to the party. The other prong was accommodation: a willingness to negotiate compromises with the party's enemies in order to take advantage of the weaknesses that mass agitation had revealed. As Murdock amply demonstrates, party leaders were on many occasions able to employ both prongs interchangeably, even simultaneously, fomenting mass agitation in order to pressure their enemies into seeking accommodation, and accommodating their enemies in order to consolidate the gains they had made through agitation.

The book is aimed at countering a set of narratives about political conflict in Republican China that reduce the subject to what Murdock considers a simplistic binary code that emphasizes left/right distinctions. This "faction-centered paradigm" has dominated standard interpretations of 20th-century history essentially because people on either side of the Communist Party/Guomindang political divide have found it in their interests to create narratives that present clean factional divisions. The result, Murdock argues, has been the popular impression that the 1927 split between the left and right wings of the GMD represents the triumph of reactionary, anti-mass forces against populist activism: Chinese Communists, their Soviet advisors, and GMD leftists pursued a revolutionary agenda that involved mass organization and agitation, while the right wing of the party followed an anti-communist trajectory that at times allied it with warlord and imperialist forces and led it to oppose the masses. According to Murdock, the problem with such an interpretation is that it assumes that the two factions had radically different agendas. In fact, however, when viewed in the light of the tactics they used, both the left and the right were moving toward a common objective: the construction of a strong, centralized state under one-party domination. Both wings of the GMD had as their short-term objective the seizure of supreme power, and each of them was capable of employing "dual-prong" tactics in order to advance their state-building goals. Party leaders on either pole were determined to establish their supremacy by building a strongly centralized party-state. Paradoxically, however, both the highly fragmented political climate and the rise of anti-foreign nationalistic sentiments that characterized life in China during the 1920s provided ample fuel for mass agitation, and party leaders responded by using agitative tactics to maneuver their foreign and domestic enemies into positions of weakness.

The use of agitation was always risky. Popular organizations and mass campaigns could develop beyond party control and either provoke dangerous foreign reactions or threaten the political and economic interests of factions on which the party depended. As Murdock puts it, sometimes the GMD leadership seemed to be operating "with the same precision as firefighters trying to manage a forest fire in shifting cross winds." (p. 284)

Nevertheless, though they acted for the most part in an *ad hoc* fashion, party leaders on the whole performed remarkably well a balancing act that required considerable skill.

Murdoch's theory rests on an assumption that in warlord China two opposing strands of nationalism evolved side by side and mirrored the two prongs that were employed by GMD tacticians. One strand defined the nation in narrow, exclusionary terms and seemed designed to give party leaders tight control of the emerging state; the other was a broader, more inclusive concept that was aimed at attracting mass support. The inclusive approach led to mass organization and agitative tactics; the exclusive one inclined toward statist or centralizing policies that suppressed organizations attempting to mobilize the political energies of the people broadly defined. Politicians on either side of the left/right divide used each of these approaches at will, with the result that in practice the state-builders employed a complex and "unique revolutionary blend" of tactics.

The book builds on pioneering studies of John Fitzgerald and Prasenjit Duara that raise questions about what nationalist Chinese actually meant by nationalism, and it adds significantly to work of C. Martin Wilbur, Michael Tsin, and others who have done much to explore the party-building efforts of GMD leaders in the 1920s. Richly detailed and meticulously documented, this work adds substantially to our understanding of Republican China's political history.

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